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# VISTAS

An Educational Publication

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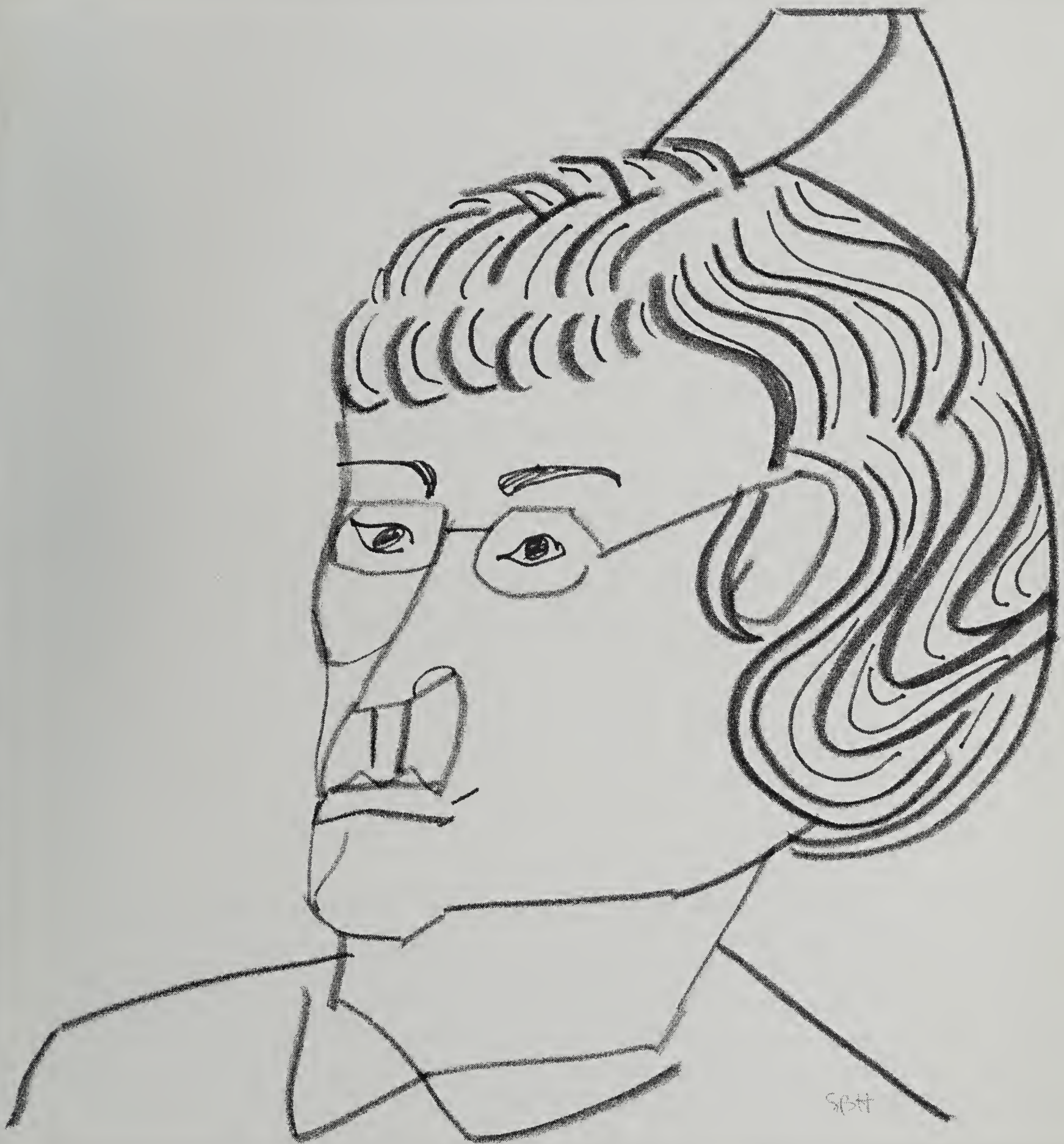
The essays, etc., appearing in the issues of this journal will, for the most part, be derived from the work of seminar students, alumni, and members of the staff of The Barnes Foundation Art Department. On occasion, we shall publish articles and pieces not directly concerned with the Foundation's philosophy but representing original work by the Art Department's students and outside contributors which the editorial staff considers to be of general interest to VISTAS readers.



*Kathy*

Kathleen Taylor—Registered Nurse (Private Duty)  
The Bryn Mawr Hospital, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, 19010






*"Effie"*

"Effie"—Registered Nurse (Private Duty)  
The Bryn Mawr Hospital, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, 19010  
As imagined by Sharon Hicks





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# VISTAS

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## Academicism\*

Kathy—Effie†

by Violette de Mazia\*\*

*'ll see you later.  
Have a nice day!*

Hospitalized recently for a stretch of a few weeks and requiring the attention, help and care of private nurses, I had the opportunity to experience, in a clear-cut fashion, the difference between the creative and the academic personality.

It was arranged that one of the nurses would come at 7 a.m., to be replaced at 3 p.m. by a second, whose eight-hour shift ended at 11 p.m. The two women hired, both full-fledged,

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\*Much of the material of this article is derived from the author's class lectures in the Art Department of The Barnes Foundation.

†“Effie” is a fictitious name.

\*\*Director of Education of The Barnes Foundation Art Department.

registered nurses, were, as it happened, of an age and equally competent and experienced. They had trained at the same nursing school at the same time in their lives. Both women had had extended nursing careers; they were robust, vigorous, energetic, with hands that bore the marks of their having worked long, heavy, hard and rough, and having “earned it!” At this point, however, they parted company, for no clearer example have I encountered of the difference between the academic and the creative personality than Effie and Kathy showed in their respective manner of fulfilling the requirements of their position with me.

Effie, the morning nurse, prompt as a preacher—I could have set my watch to her rigid schedule—on each and every arrival *always*, predictably, mechanically and monotonously, greeted me with “Good morning. Did we have a good night?” and, not waiting for a response, launched into a weather report. Contemporaneously, and it never failed to the day I was discharged, she readied all the implements for brushing the teeth, even though, on her very first morning with me, I had let her know that I brush my teeth not before, but after, breakfast. Yet, each subsequent morning, upon my reminding her of my practice, she collected up the paraphernalia she had brought to my bedside and returned them to their place, to be brought out again when breakfast was over. Came 7:30 and, with it, the “we must have ‘our’ bath” routine, almost a rite to be religiously performed in the name of “good”<sup>\*</sup> nursing. The morning’s blood pressure, temperature and heart rate monitoring—attended to, as it should have been, precisely and with dispatch—was carried out as if by an automaton to the accompaniment of a computer-readout-like recitation of the numbers.

Throughout this performance, every word, every action, I could almost say every motion, seemed to be the result of a button having been pressed at exactly the “right” moment in exactly the “right” mode. Day after day, morning after morning, breakfast after breakfast, lunch after lunch, I knew what to expect, nor was I ever surprised: I had got myself a well-oiled

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<sup>\*</sup>In a cartoon by Hank Ketcham of a few years ago, Dennis the Menace indignantly says to his neighbor Mr. Wilson, “Whatta ya mean, I ‘need a good spankin’?” There AREN’T no ‘good’ spankin’s.”



machine which had been made to learn and had learned letter-perfect, and not at all a human being who had trained as a sensitive, perceptive individual to be of nursing assistance to ill people. Effie rolled along on tracks laid down once and for all, it seemed, on the day she graduated from nursing school, and she travelled with eyes focussed on the text-book in hand, never lifting her head to look out at the passing world.

Kathy (for Kathleen) Taylor, the nurse who came in at 3 p.m., of course performed similar duties, followed the same general sequence of care. But Kathy was made of other stuff, of alive, responsive, human stuff. In every action was there the feeling of Kathy living, breathing, and, even more, the sense that, whatever she was doing, she was doing it with knowledge not merely of what was expected of her as a nurse, but of why, and therefore how, it was hers to do. Though, as any human being does, Kathy now and then made a "mistake," forgot this or that, one could almost have hugged her for it simply because the "mistake," the forgetfulness arose from the fact that she used the routine to attend to the patient rather than using the patient to attend to the routine. That is, she made the patient feel and be fully aware that Kathy, as a person and a nurse, in the most natural and sensitive way, was attending *that* patient, was responding to and making fit her every mood, word and doing to *that* patient's specific needs.

Where Effie could not act except by the rule, Kathy acted according to what she could do in her concern about the comfort and need of the patient. Thus, when hospital regulations state that medicine prescribed by an attending doctor is to be sent up from the hospital pharmacy, Effie waits for it to be sent up, even though the patient is anxious to have it, while Kathy breaks the "rules" and, after making sure the patient is not left alone, runs down to the pharmacy to fetch it.

I had occasion over those weeks to mention to one of the doctors how annoying Effie's nursing technique was to me. He was more than surprised at my complaint, remarking with no little force, "Why, Effie is one of our best private nurses here at the hospital, if not in the land!"

Indeed, Effie was the best. I had to acknowledge it. She did everything, but everything, "right," according to the book, according to the routine she and/or the nurse's code had estab-

lished—all at the precise time and in the prescribed manner called for by her training. She did, in truth, everything “well,” everything as stipulated in her lessons . . . irrespective of whether or not the individual patient was ready for what she did or wanted or required it.

What Effie presented was, yes, a sort of perfection, even to the point of being herself starched in a starched uniform, neat and precise in every detail of her demeanor, with every hair in her trim coiffure always in its own same place: I could almost recognize each one as it rigidly recumbed within the stiff curve of the hair-sprayed permanent wave. All this may be set against Kathy’s relaxed, easy manner and her touseled mop of short hair. But Effie’s is a perfection of technical performance only, of mechanics, so to speak, not a perfection of results, not, that is, a perfection in terms of the meaning of the performance. For there is, in such a performance, an element of hypocrisy, a literal self-servingness, a doing-as-one-should, rather than a doing-for-the-sake-of some purpose or meaning beyond one’s own “perfection.”

This—the perfection of technique without regard for what the technique produces—is the hallmark of the academic. It betrays, too, a kind of naïveté, for it confuses training with genuine learning. What the book has said that one should know is, for the academic, all one needs to know because, for him, it is all there is to know.

Kathy, in contrast to Effie, exemplifies the creative personality. The techniques of nursing care were there, but ruling them in her makeup was not the need to do them “right,” to be the “best,” the “perfect” nurse, but the need to use them in, to make them serve, a context—specifically, the complex, subtle, fluctuating context presented by a patient with individualized, changing requirements.

Thus were Kathy’s ways of doing perpetually subject to adjustments, to adaptations, as she perceived and responded to the patient’s condition and preferences at any given time. In other words, to Kathy, the patient was a human being like her, but one who needed what she believed she could and would try to provide. To Effie, in contrast, the patient was a thing



there, on that bed, who had to be clinically bombarded, assaulted, in accord with a strict, pre-ordained schedule.\*

Lacking, nowadays, in much of human endeavor is an awareness of the relationship of statements made and of actions taken to goals—of means, that is, to ends. In the course of my hospital stay, I had the opportunity of gauging Kathy's and Effie's respective sense of the relationship between action and goal, or purpose. When, for instance, I was ready to try my legs and walk again after a long stay under bed covers, Kathy supported my body in such a posture as to encourage *my* taking each step, one following upon another; Effie supported my body only as such support prevents one from falling, with no sense of what would lend me the impetus to use my legs as I wanted and needed to. Effie goes through the motions of helping; Kathy actually does help.

Equally revealing of the radical difference between the two nurses in their respective ability to perceive an action in its entirety, to follow out, in anticipation, the consequences of what they do, occurred when I asked for the mouthwash: from Effie, I would, indeed, get the bottle of mouthwash and . . . nothing else; from Kathy, on the other hand, the "kidney" bowl would come with the mouthwash bottle: I did not have to remind her that one does not swallow mouthwash, but must dispose of it in some other way.

What the two episodes just recounted show, which Kathy

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\*Incidentally, that approach characterizes the attitude demonstrated by some of the hospital doctors towards their patients as well—the attitude of those medical professionals for whom the patient is but a thing in room number whatever, who is to be clinically bombarded, assaulted, time after time, every hour on the hour, as it sometimes seems, by repeated examinations, blood studies, X-rays, computerized anatomical topographies, tests galore of all sorts, with no concern for the patient's psychological reactions to these assaults, but only for his physiological responses. I tried once to rebel, claiming sheer exhaustion. The riposte came clear and fast: "Why," said the doctor, "you will be *doing* nothing; it is *we* who will do the work!"

Be it an inability or an unwillingness of imagining one's self in the other person's place—the recipient of what we say or do—the failure to do so is, in fact, what is responsible for most of the untoward situations that encumber our lives, not only in nursing and other medical matters, but in all areas of human activity. Where interaction should be the norm, it is separation, a kind of "apartheid" of one from another, that prevails. As a result, egotism is rampant, and self-justification, everywhere, the order of the day, with, everywhere too, the direst of consequences.



understood and Effie failed to understand, is that technique is not merely a *doing*. It is a *doing of*, a specific way of *accomplishing* something specific, a *means*, that is, to a particular end. Hammering is not a technique; it is merely an activity—until it serves to hammer *that* nail into *that* plank in the specifically *intended* place and at the specifically *intended* angle. Likewise is the supporting of a person to help him walk a technique only when it does help him to walk, just as the fetching of mouthwash is a serviceable action only when it includes fetching also what is needed so that the mouthwash can be used. Nevertheless, one could easily picture Effie going home at the end of each “shift,” happy and contented that she had “done her duty and done it well.” As for Kathy, one could easily see her leaving the hospital, warm within herself, rewarded by the fact that she felt she had been able to help in the best way she could and thinking already of possible ways of being helpful on the morrow.

Overall, then, Effie stands for efficiency—detached, cold, *academic* efficiency. Kathy stands also for efficiency, but efficiency a thousand times enhanced by intelligence, interest, insight, initiative, imagination, sensitivity, warm caring—*creative* efficiency. Kathy, as creative, adapted the nursing code or tradition to the specific demands of the specific situation; Effie, as academic, adopted the code and tradition.

Then, too, there was pleasure taken in Kathy’s creative nursing, with a firm and lasting bond of warm affection developing between Kathy and me. Effie’s academic efficiency, in contrast, brought about an ever-widening moat of ice water separating her from me and keeping her away. Kathy was sensitive, observant, resilient, imaginative, refreshing and interesting; she learned as she performed what was required of her, yet never did she lose her effectiveness. Effie was insensitive, rigid, unimaginative, a dullard, a robot, frozen in the mold of academicism in whatever she did, technically correct and, in technical terms, effective, too. Not surprisingly, Kathy could take some ribbing; she could enjoy bantering exchanges with her patient, as she showed herself possessed of a nimble sense of humor. But, Effie? One would not dare to rib her. “A sense of humor—what is that?” might Effie have asked. “If I ever heard of it, I never understood it.” Never a dull moment when Kathy was on duty. Unrelieved boredom when Effie was around.

For all the uniqueness of Kathy, she doesn't stand alone. There are other Kathys in the nursing world, each one, in *her* particular way, creative. At the top of the group of those creative ones I have come to know is the zealous, ingenious, patient-to-the-nth-degree and indefatigable nurse Kay (for Catherine) Phillips, with whom I also developed a bond of friendship and who fits Kathy's shoes well, but who is caring in her own way, uncannily anticipating the patient's needs and wishes, knowing the right thing to do, doing it, and doing it well, giving of herself, insatiable for work even beyond the call of duty, and never a whimper. And there is ever-dependable Tammy Grant (though a nurse's aide she still be), a rock to lean on, ever at the ready; and the lively and spirited Sylvia Artwell, a nurse's aide, too; and the elegant, subtly strict nurse Dorothy Denzer; and nurse's aides big Bea (for Beatrice) McBride and equally big Dorothy Antley, both big in muscle, in practical common sense and utter willingness to do what chores loom up, too; and young, gentle, a bit theatrically whimsical nurse Lora. These nurses are all caring and all, along with Kathy, creative. And there are others: they are rare, but they are there.

Although Effie could no more be duplicated than Kathy, there are also other Effies in the nursing world, each one academic in *her* own way, each one different from the others, yet not for that budging from the strict routine imposed upon them by their academic code. They are not rare—these “do-it-yourself” helpers—and they are there.

Academicism takes many forms, and bureaucracy is one of the worst of them. Very possibly originating in France,\* it unfortunately invaded the United States, where it flourished and still grows apace, gradually dampening, even stifling, the spirit of free enterprise, intellectual adventuresomeness, imaginativeness, creativeness and kowtowing to and nurturing the un-

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\*Bureaucracy, with its numbingly formal routine and inflexible officialdom, has reigned in France for generations. A large percentage of the adult population are “*fonctionnaires*,” i.e., persons involved in public service, at a high or low echelon, in the administrative hierarchy, cogs in the well-oiled machine of the bureaucracy, with the regulations, the machinations, the politics and regimentation that ensue overwhelming the individuality of every one of them.



felt, the uniform, the mediocre, as all initiative is fatally encumbered with nonsensical, irrelevant detail.

Were Kathy's and Effie's comparative merit as servants of their profession to be judged by the standards of bureaucracy, as it undoubtedly is at the business offices of the hospital and of the nurses's organization, the conclusion reached could not help but fail to account for the real essentials of the care each gives. On paper, they would appear equal: the number of hours put in, promptness of arrival, performance on the job and willingness to do what is required are the same for both of them. For, under bureaucratic standards, the fact is that two people who are, in actuality, at opposite ends of the pole in personality, and, therefore, necessarily different in how they do what they do, often cannot be told apart. Insofar as one and the other punch the clock at the right time, wear the right uniform, administer the right medicine at the right time, perform the right, *i.e.*, as taught, lifting and washing and feeding and rubbing maneuvers, and so forth, they are identical.

Kathy and Effie themselves were hapless victims of the bureaucratic regimen that defined their nursing duties, obliged, as they were, every day to fill out forms for this and forms for that, all to be turned in to the head nurse at the end of the daily session. It often seemed that more time was spent in filling forms than in answering the needs of the patient. And does it not gratify us when the form's designated spaces for the specified data are neatly filled in, as per the particular regulations and codes, in much the same way that we are gratified by the pattern of the crossword puzzle when, with a kind of "Eureka" fervor, the final letter is inserted, as per that puzzle's code, and the final blank square is eliminated?

By its very nature, bureaucracy is simply incapable of accounting for, even of recognizing, the individuality, with all the significance which that entails, of those who function under its domain. Rather, all participants are seen and recognized solely by the degree of their adherence to the rules, to the routine, to the prescriptions of the book. Nor is this intended to imply that all rules and regulations should be abandoned or ignored: rules regulate our lives, personal and social. Rather, we mean to indicate that an intelligent, sensitive balance should be sought and maintained between the needed rules and human nature.



Academicism, *i.e.*, technique employed without a feeling for context or aim, as it affects any activity or endeavor, corrupts it. In our use of language, for instance, almost from nowhere, it seems, new terms, new phrases crop up and are used, at first, with all the potency of their full meaning. But, soon, use becomes overuse, and meaning loses its subtleties, its complexities, its substance. The phrase "Have a nice day!" for example, once no doubt consciously articulated with a heart-felt sense of beneficence, is now uttered as by a push-button mechanism, without a pause for even a moment's reflection on the significance of the words: we do not listen to what we say; we do not hear it; we have become insensitive to it. I recall, as a case in point, an episode that occurred at ten o'clock one night as an attendant was wheeling me through the dimly lit corridors of the hospital to the X-ray room. A doctor friend of mine and I, coming unexpectedly upon each other, chatted for a moment, reminiscing warmly about this and that before continuing to our respective destinations. As we prepared to separate and move on, I realized of a sudden that my friend had shifted his brain to idle. His demeanor seemed to grow vague, remote, non-seeing, and he said, "I'll see you later; have a nice day." At ten o'clock at night, it struck me not merely as funny, but also as ludicrous.\*

*All that's painted is not art.*

Putting the lesson of Kathy and Effie into the context of an artist's work, an analogy may be followed as we consider Kathy's response to the circumstances she met with, and the consequences of her response, in regard to an artist's response to the circumstances he meets that lead to expression, and another analogy of Effie to the academic in art, *i.e.*, the person who is dead to aesthetic expression and either does not know it or does not mind it.

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\*And then there is the account of the drugstore pharmacist who, upon handing over his customer's doctor's order of aspirin, Terpin Elixir Hydrate, Milk of Magnesia, Pertussin, cough lozenges and an electric heat pad, speeded his sniffing, sneezing, and coughing customer on his way with, "Have a nice day."

A starting point might be in what we should look for in a work of art—namely, what the artist says about things and aspects of the world we know, what he says that is his, new, which we could not have known before, since what he reveals comes from *his* experience, *his* response to things and aspects we know in our respective ways. And he responds, first, as a human being like the rest of us, not as a bird, a cow, a dog. We should also expect and look for what there might be in the artist's work that comes from the fact that an artist responds not only as artists in general do, but also as *the* artist *he* is, *this* artist, which no other artist is or can be: it is Tintoretto saying *his* say about "Christ and the Woman of Samaria" (Plate 103), in contrast to Horace Pippin saying *his* (Plate 104), just as it is Kathy rolling with the punches, so to speak, or parrying the uncooperativeness of a weary patient with good-natured and soothing humor, as against another nurse, equally alive to the patient's needs, because of her personality using gentle persuasion to bring about the desired end.

However, that someone works in a medium of art does not automatically make him an artist. There are people everywhere who, merely because they wield a brush, a chisel, a pen and do not plow the field or push a broom to earn their living, enjoy kidding themselves that they are artists. As such, they are, in their own eyes, entitled to float on a much loftier level than the rest of us, though it is, in fact, what they produce that floats in the air, devoid as it is of substance and significance as art. They are the counterfeiters, the fakes, who never fail to pollute the fringes of art and, therefore, to confuse the real issues. The genuine artists, on the other hand, do not use their work to set themselves above the rest of us. They are very sanely human, and their work is a serious affair to them. They are, granted, what we could call biased in their views and interests, since they are deeply concerned with the *aesthetic* nature of what we describe as universal attributes and their broad human qualities. And often, because of that, to many people artists are strange kinds of people.

Nevertheless, the universal attributes and broad human qualities that engross the artist so profoundly have fundamental significance to our lives in the sense that we are all inherently sensitive to, concerned with and interested in those aspects, in



varying degrees, to be sure, whether we are artists, sell bonds or hardware, pound the typewriter, wash the dishes, or whatever. We are, for example, sensitive to such a quality as order, order on our desk, in our grocery list, in our clothes closet, in the process of writing a letter or computing expenses or setting the table or planning our day's activities. We are sensitive also to variety, another broad human quality: we respond, that is, with satisfaction to a certain amount of diversity in whatever we do, in what we see, hear, wear, eat, type, and so on. We respond, likewise, with satisfaction to such broad human qualities as colorfulness, decorativeness (*i.e.*, eye appeal), aliveness, delicacy, solidity, sense of conviction, to name a few.

What leads people to call the artist "strange" is that the artist's interest in those aspects is the interest of the specialist; he is not just sensitive to them, but is *acutely* so. And, further, he also is often more or less blind or insensitive to, uninterested in, other aspects of life, in particular, those aspects we refer to as the practical: he may not make a success of selling bonds or fruits and vegetables or, indeed, even his own paintings; he is not interested in selling things. He may, however, be very successful, from his point of aesthetic interest, in displaying fruits or vegetables in an eye-attracting array—as may an artist-painter be with respect to color areas on his canvas—setting out a cream-white cauliflower, for example, and surrounding it with glistening red peppers, perhaps, and a handful of fresh, cool green beans, with some oddly rounded, dusty brown potatoes at the side placed against a few bunches of whitish-green, rigid celery stalks. And for any of us sensitive at all to that aesthetic (intrinsically and intellectually sensuous) aspect of things, his arrangement is "a feast for the eye," whether or not we are interested in the price of the vegetables thus presented or in buying them for food.

We have all seen such displays: they are to be found all over, in European markets and markets in this country, in the windows of restaurants everywhere, in magazines and on book covers, and so on, and we have all enjoyed them. But the restaurateur and the store owner, the advertiser and the publisher are interested primarily in the wares as merchandise rather than as art, and they will not, if they can help it, place an unripe green piece of fruit on top of the heap, as an artist might to

create, for instance, a contrast of colors that excites him and satisfies his aesthetic interest—as happens in Cézanne’s “Still Life with Ginger Jar” (Plate 68), in which a cool-colored piece of fruit is placed between warm-colored pieces of fruit for the sake of establishing a drama of color contrast that has nothing to do with the prospect of selling the fruits or vegetables or even of selling the picture. Yet, insofar as those merchants and advertisers have “the knack,” the interest in and feeling for displaying wares in colorful arrangements of orderly, varied units, and insofar as we, the onlookers, are attracted by and enjoy their displays, irrespective of whether we intend to buy or even like their wares, both they and we share, have in common, with the artist that feeling for, that sensitivity to and interest in those universal visual attributes of the world and their intrinsic broad human significance which characterize the artist’s point of view about the world, with the difference that the artist, in contrast to the rest of us, specializes in them, makes them his life’s constant, overriding concern.

Further, the more deeply involved, the more engaged the artist’s feelings are in what interests him, the more also is his mind, consciously and unconsciously, engaged in the process of presenting the visual attributes of things in terms of their intrinsic aesthetic broad human significance—something that many onlookers of fruit displays or of the color displays in paintings fail to recognize. In connection with this fact, we might refer to two passages from John Dewey’s *Art as Experience*\* that give an opening into what art involves.

The idea that the artist does not think as intently and penetratingly as a scientific inquirer is absurd. A painter must consciously undergo the effect of his every brush stroke or he will not be aware of what he is doing and where his work is going. Moreover, he has to see each particular connection of doing and undergoing in relation to the whole that he desires to produce. To apprehend such relations is to think, and is one of the most exacting modes of thought. [p. 45]

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\*Minton, Balch & Company, New York, 1934.



To think effectively in terms of relations of qualities is as severe a demand upon thought as to think in terms of symbols, verbal and mathematical. Indeed, since words are easily manipulated in mechanical ways, the production of a work of genuine art probably demands more intelligence than does most of the so-called thinking that goes on among those who pride themselves on being “intellectuals.” [p. 46]

To that intelligent and sensitive individual, *i.e.*, the artist as described by John Dewey, belongs the creative personality such as Kathy exemplified. But far more common as to number of representatives is the so-called artist of the academic type of personality, some of whose characteristics were broadly indicated in our description of Effie, and whom we shall now try to put our finger more firmly on, to identify more specifically what he is and what he does. When we know more or less what he is and does, we shall follow and examine his attitude towards art and the effect that his views and his doings exert on art education.

The academic person, the academic mind or mentality in art, as in nursing and other areas of human endeavor, has existed since art itself came into being. The term “academic” originates from the name of the hero in Greek mythology Akademos, on whose supposed domain were the gardens where Plato met with his disciples and formed the first organization known as an academy, and generally refers to scholarly pursuits and attributes. In the sense that concerns us, however, academic has a more specific meaning: we use it to designate those “Effies” who, in any medium of action or expression, in their daily doings as well as in art, wherever or whenever they ply their trade, cling in obdurate persistence to some manner of doing or some idea innovated by others or themselves—for the painter, an idea, for instance, of composition, of color, of subject, or whatnot—that has had its day and significance. And they make of that manner of doing or idea a fetish to which forever they remain blindly and doggedly devoted. And, also, as a result, by their own work and teaching they establish sets of rules and regulations that become formulas and dogmas,



different, yes, at different places and periods, but always characterized by arbitrarily rigid, artificial standards according to which they proclaim art is to be created and judged, accepted or rejected. (Doesn't Effie re-appear?)

Such academic persons abound in modern times no less than in previous eras. Among those in the art world of the twentieth century are, for instance, Lavery (*e.g.*, Plate 14), Leon Kroll (*e.g.*, Plate 30), Balthus (*e.g.*, Plate 34), Robert Henri (*e.g.*, Plate 8), Léger (*e.g.*, Plate 22), Thomas Hart Benton (*e.g.*, Plate 120), to put forth but a randomly chosen few from the practically unlimited store of examples. There are, too, those many mere pattern-makers, who invoke Cubism or the holy-to-them name of Picasso as justification for what they produce, Tal-Coat (*e.g.*, Plate 91), for instance, and the "action painters," the "exploders," such as Walasse Ting (*e.g.*, Plate 21). And there is also Dali (*e.g.*, Plate 45) and many among the "minimalists" (*e.g.*, Plate 27) and the "photo-realists" (*e.g.*, Plate 95).

Obviously, great differences exist among these academic painters as to their respective versions or brands of academism, which differences have, on occasion, led one or another of them to call others academic—the pot truly calling the kettle black. Unfortunately, all of them, of whatever type of pot or of kettle, are, as a rule, clever, slick craftsmen, accomplished technicians, and many are, besides, also art politicians, lobbyists, skillful public relations men, impressive for their technical ability, their seeming knowledge of what they are about, just as Effie was impressive to onlookers for her seeming knowledge of what her profession required of its practitioners.

We call it unfortunate that the academic painters are proficient craftsmen because it is precisely that proficiency that fools the public and art students into crediting them with merit as artists, a circumstance clearly paralleling that of Effie, whose "proficiency" fooled the doctors into thinking that what she offered was genuine nursing care (just ask her patients).

Blinded by their prowess in the handling of the painter's tools, the onlooker fails to see that what the academic painters achieve is little else than a showy display of hashed-up tricks, a reshuffling of cards that have been played well by those who played them first, when they were played according to and because of what the then-present situation required. So is there Dali's

“Portrait of Gala with the Angelus of Millet” (Plate 47), for instance, with its stale rehash of the textile in Ingres’ “Mme Rivière” (Plate 48) and the color scheme and space ambiance and light of Vermeer’s “The Kitchen Maid” (Plate 52).

When we refer to the academic as resorting to tricks, we have in mind the meaning of trick as a device for getting an advantage through deception. The academic’s tricks or devices are, of course, directed at getting him the advantage of the public’s attention by way of technical showmanship. A trick is also a ready-made device used to achieve what has previously been achieved in order, as we say in French, *épater le bourgeois*, that is, to stun the layman, or, again in French, *jeter la poudre aux yeux*, (to throw powder in the eyes), that is, to pull the wool over one’s eyes. So is there often, over and above other tricks, an undue reliance on the meaning of the title of a painting for most of the painting’s meaning—as is the case with Ben Shahn’s “Portrait of the Artist When Young” (Plate 98) and his “Four-Piece Orchestra” (Plate 90) and Dali’s “My wife, nude, contemplating her own flesh becoming stairs, three vertebrae of a column, sky, and architecture” (Plate 45). And Grant Wood, in “American Gothic” (Plate 26), besides coming up with a title that speciously imparts meaning to the painting, *i.e.*, tells the viewer what is there for him to see, regardless of what the painted canvas shows him, also resorts to the trickery of those age-old, time-honored devices of a bilateral arrangement and a pyramidal formation, which make for a simple symmetrical balance. Yet, he does nothing with these devices to give them new significance from the point of view of art, using them, instead, as the academic in general uses his tricks, in the manner of a cliché.\*

So far, we have applied the label of academic to a few painters

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\*Cliché, a French word, initially designated an electrotpe or a stereotype printing plate from which duplications were made with diminishing clarity, until the plate became so worn from use that it no longer yielded an adequate representation. In typography, a cliché is a phrase used often enough to warrant being cast as a unit on a printing bar so that it would not have to be set up each time it occurred in a text, but could be used again and again as originally cast. Cliché, then, we may say, stands for a mechanical overuse of any idea, be it of color, compositional arrangement, musical sound, words, subject, technique—a use which tends to make the idea trite and hackneyed. It is a going through the motions (and here again are Effie’s actions recalled).



without providing any justification for our judgement. Now, however, we shall objectify our observations and, at the same time, develop further what it means to be academic. For the purpose, we shall look more closely at examples of academic work, with particular attention paid to the above-mentioned painting "American Gothic" (Plate 26), by Grant Wood.

Grant Wood, an American painter who died in 1942, was, and in many "art" circles still is, hailed as a great American artist—"the artist of the future," in the words of one of our "art critics"; "an innovator uncorrupted by any European influence," Thomas Craven said of him, with other critics, too, thus hoisting Grant Wood onto the pedestal of purely American art. It is from these two standpoints, from the standpoint of art, *i.e.*, aesthetic creativeness, or what is the artist's, and from the standpoint of having an unadulterated American identity, whatever that may be, that we shall examine "American Gothic."

We take our initial look at the painting, and we find an extraordinarily impeccable technical skill (so we did in the case of Effie), a craftsmanship that, yes, deserves admiration for what it is, but not for what it isn't: we can, after all, admire the textbook perfection of Effie's performance, however much we may deplore its lack of appropriateness to the given circumstance.

We look further into "American Gothic," and we find nothing, as we have implied above and as we shall see, which is not a rehash of features distinctive of various European traditions. If, for example, we are familiar with the work of the Florentine painters Gozzoli (*e.g.*, Plate 4) and Ghirlandaio (*e.g.*, Plate 11), we find that Grant Wood has merely taken over their clear space setting, *i.e.*, a depth of space empty of atmospheric ambience. And, from the early Germans (*e.g.*, Plate 46) and the Flemish (*e.g.*, Plate 51), he has merely taken over and duplicated the surface-deep, compartmental color as well as he could and the detailed, miniaturelike, descriptive linear drawing. From works by various artists, for instance, Van Eyck's "The Arnolfini Wedding" (Plate 1), he lifted the pyramidal formation in which foreground and background are combined; this occurs in the Van Eyck in the compositional pyramid established by the linking of the two figures with the chandelier and in the Grant Wood by the linking of the two figures with the house gable (Effie could have done as well).

The point of the above is to indicate that the elements that Grant Wood took from the traditions of European painting have only been warmed up for the new occasion and presented under the high-sounding title "American Gothic," by which title Grant Wood simply ignores his plundering of the traditions and rather brazenly puts in a claim to a purely American identity that owes nothing to any non-American art (though it is hard to imagine what "purely American" could be if not the result of that melting-pot blending of a number of European and other civilizations).

Besides, what sensitive, intelligent person can relish a warmed up serving of anything, once he has relished that thing in its original state and when, moreover, as in Grant Wood and other academic painters, it is advertised, passed off and boomed up as the real McCoy? Do we like roast chicken? Yes, most of us do. But let us re-roast the roast chicken and see how well we like it; and how indignant we would be, with a right to be so, if in a restaurant the menu led us to expect what we know as roast chicken and we are served yesterday's cooked fowl warmed up for today's meal, now listed under the fancy name of roast chicken *maison*, which the chef insists has nothing to do with what we know as roast chicken.

Indeed, the chef is right, it has not. On the other hand, we might order and, if it is properly and honestly prepared, enjoy, relish, say, a chicken croquette. It differs, certainly, from the original cooked chicken, but, far from being an attempt to duplicate that original dish, only to fall short in the effort, it has had a new handling and has acquired new ingredients and has attained a new, distinctive identity—an identity with its own deliciousness which concedes nothing to the other kind of deliciousness that characterized the roast chicken. Nor does the croquette conceal the fact that it owes its origin in part, even in large part, to the original cooked chicken (and doesn't Kathy come to mind?).

A parallel to the relationship between the croquette and the roast chicken can be seen in the relationship between El Greco (*e.g.*, Plate 3) and Tintoretto (*e.g.*, Plate 103) with regard to Tintoretto's pattern of light and dark as used by El Greco and between Soutine (*e.g.*, Plate 16) and El Greco (*e.g.*, Plate 3) with regard to El Greco's angular light patterns as used by Soutine.



El Greco owes no apology to Tintoretto, nor does Soutine to El Greco, although both El Greco and Soutine owe a lot to their predecessors, (as Kathy owes a lot to what has been done in the field of nursing), specifically, the concept for their individually distinctive angular patterns of streaks and slashes of light.

We can come closer to our indictment of Grant Wood as academic by observing that François Clouet (*e.g.*, Plate 10), a French artist of the sixteenth century, helped himself to the very same feature of the Germans (*e.g.*, Plate 46) and the Flemish (*e.g.*, Plate 51) used by Grant Wood, namely, the clean-cut, linearly detailed, descriptive drawing. In the case of Grant Wood, we are served what we have called a rehash: we recognize the source, and find it minus the subtlety, the finesse of the original but plus . . . nothing of a positive aesthetic nature. In Clouet, the clean-cut, linearly detailed, descriptive drawing of the Germans and the Flemish are also served to us: we recognize the sources, as we recognize the cooked chicken in the croquette, and we find it minus the weight and heavy substance of the originals, but plus Clouet's own new set of broad human values of delicacy, lightness, a filigree kind of decorativeness, with an appeal of its own not to be found in either the Germans or the Flemish. Correspondingly, in the early work of the modern Italian artist Giorgio de Chirico, *e.g.*, "Plaza" (Plate 118), can a debt be traced to the early Florentines (*e.g.*, Plates 115 and 117), for instance, in the clear space setting, the clean-cut boundaries and the stress on the light and dark of the color for modelling. But the de Chirico does not at all merely serve us again the Florentine ideas under a new gravy, as it were, or a new color scheme or a new name, such as "Italian Gothic," on the menu. De Chirico's "Plaza" is new because the relationships even of the same or very similar materials are new, and de Chirico brings about a new entity, with its own characteristics—an all-over weirdness, an other-worldliness, due much to the nature and relationships of the color, the peculiarly abrupt contrasts of light and dark, the very quick space recession, the arid foreground, the isolation of the empty space, the boxing-in of space, the stage-set character of the organization and the sudden peeps of open spaces.

Then there is the claim made for the Grant Wood painting that it is "purely American." But, what of the work is actually

American, purely or not? Nothing but its subject—the bit of life it happens to comment on, which, in its turn, is recounted by the title. And, about that recounting, we should note that the comment made by the title is literary rather than pictorial, for what it says comes not from the character of or qualities intrinsic to the painter's medium—other colors, other lines, and still the title's message remains the same—but from something outside the work.

In order to get Grant Wood's message, then, we are expected to know the picture's title and the local significance of its subject. But that is not of the category of things we can consider universal attributes or aesthetic broad human qualities, *i.e.*, things which an artist is concerned with and which his work, therefore, reveals. To put Grant Wood to the test, let us forget the title (we never heard of it) and minimize the subject by turning the canvas upside down (Plate 12). Now what do we get? Nothing but figures upside down, and nothing that has not been done before, that has not been said before—clear space, detailed drawing, color that merely labels, all taken straight from the Florentine, the Flemish and the German traditions—and more convincingly said in the originals because more honestly said when freshly invented by the Florentines (*e.g.*, Plates 115 and 117), the Flemish (*e.g.*, Plate 51) and the Germans (*e.g.*, Plate 46), of which the Grant Wood is but a second-hand rendition, a tricky, pretentious imitation, an academic version (shades of Effie!).

To see the difference between the Grant Wood and paintings that are creative, we might now put to the same test both Pippin's and Tintoretto's paintings entitled "Christ and the Woman of Samaria" (Plates 103 and 104). By turning them upside down (Plates 105 and 106), we, again, minimize the subject, the story. However, in contrast to the case of the Grant Wood, with these we still get, here and now, such broad human qualities that are of and in the picture, the painted area, of and in its color, its light, etc., as, from the Pippin, starkness and intensity of drama, to name but two, and, from the Tintoretto, mellowness and warmth; and these qualities are ones that we cannot get, and never did get exactly as from these, from other pictures, even other pictures by these artists.

Our point, to repeat, is that the qualities in the Tintoretto



and the Pippin paintings, as in creative achievements by any artist, are of, are conveyed by, what is here and now presented in the work done as a result of the specific selection, use and organization of the constituent elements. The qualities are not, that is, of the subject *per se*, *i.e.*, of the subject as we may know it or have known it elsewhere. Moreover, Tintoretto's "Christ and the Woman of Samaria" is a Venetian painting not because of where the artist was born and where he painted and not because of what he chose as his subject or his title—on that score, echoing the claim for the Grant Wood, we would label the Tintoretto as purely Palestinian—but because of specific intrinsic characteristics of its color and light that are comprised in the distinctive features expressed in work done in and around Venice in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and because of the general feelings it embodies that represent the overall reaction of the Venetian painters of that time to their environment.

Yet another mark of the academic is illustrated by looking at such other works by Grant Wood as "The Daughters of the American Revolution" (Plate 100) and "Washington and the Cherry Tree" (Plate 97). This mark is that, once the academic has devised a cliché from others' contributions or from his own, he makes of it a formula, a standard recipe for all occasions, which he applies or resorts to for any purpose. Grant Wood's recipe leaps to the eye: clear space, literally descriptive drawing, clean-cut boundaries, as we have already noted, and color, non-structural, that merely labels the surface,\* *i.e.*, color that lacks intrinsic aesthetic qualities and that does not build up or belong to the substance of the unit it covers. All these ingredients are lifted wholesale for every Grant Wood painting from the same sources—again, as we have noted, the Florentines, the Flemish and the Germans. There is, indeed, often a specially heavy looting from the German sources, such as Huber (*e.g.*, Plate 17)

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\*Or, one could say that the color goes no further than just labelling the hue of each compositional element of the subject and telling something about what the subject probably looked like—that, for instance, the woman's hair was blond, or, at any rate, pale, that her apron was garnet, that the sky was blue, and so on.

and Holbein (*e.g.*, Plate 86),\* for his single-figure portraits, as shown, for example, in his “Woman with Plant” (Plate 79), for which he directly appropriates the “pushed forward” relationship between figure and background setting (*cf.*, *e.g.*, Plate 80) and the blackening of the blue sky to be found in the Holbein and the Huber, respectively, and which has its origin in the Flemish.

Furthermore, Grant Wood’s appropriations from the Germans for “Woman with Plant” are open to the same criticism that was made of his use of the traditions in “American Gothic”: we recognize the sources and . . . see not a trace of anything new of aesthetic consequences. The subject, the sitter, is new, but that, to be sure, is neither to Grant Wood’s blame nor to his credit. We may take note, again, of the extraordinary craftsmanship, it is true, and true also and lamentable, from the point of view of art, is the fact that that craftsmanship is wasted on a fraud, a piece of plagiarism: we find nothing of aesthetic merit that could be said to be Grant Wood’s own, but only things taken over from others and palmed off as his.

Demonstrating from another vantage the academic’s application of a formula or recipe are the works of Thomas Hart Benton (*e.g.*, Plates 89 and 120). We see the recipe each and every one follows: a cup of dark and light, a handful of sharply cutting contrasts, a dash of smooth gradations of tone, a heaping spoonful of curvaceousness, and so on, repeated *ad nauseam* forever after as a cliché, with, inevitably, the same resulting effects *i.e.*, the same sense of contrast, the same flabby three-dimensionality, the same curving, bulbous twists.

But what, after all, is wrong with repeating one’s manner of doing?† Well, suppose I come to you one day, my cheeks aglow, my eyes asparkle, and I tell you that my painting was awarded first prize in the local show. And the next day, I come to you,

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\*Grant Wood studied in Germany and was certainly exposed to the work of Huber and Holbein. If we accept Thomas Craven’s categorizing of Grant Wood as “purely American,” then we not only willfully ignore the evidence of our eyes, but also irrationally deny that what Grant Wood was confronted with ever came to his notice.

†Many people, indeed, may ask whether such artists as Matisse, Cézanne and Renoir do not repeat themselves. The answer is no, although, because their personality is powerfully evident in each of their pieces, they may, to some of us, appear to.



my cheeks aglow, my eyes asparkle, and I tell you that my house burned down to the ground. Furthermore, on each occasion of my speaking to you, I use an Ethel Barrymore tone of voice, gesture and rolling of the eyes. What would you think of me? My stories with reference to my unvaried expression and my Ethel Barrymore delivery are like Grant Wood's or Thomas Hart Benton's, or, for that matter, any academic painter's work with reference to the repetitious effects and the use of the traditions.

With Benton's painting, as with Grant Wood's, the repetition of the manner of doing is made all the more deplorable by being an obvious rehash of a number of artists taken as models, a re-roasting, as we have described it, of the roast chicken. Benton re-roasts, for instance, the characteristic pattern of light and dark of Leonardo (cf., *e.g.*, Plate 85) and the compositional emphasis of the curvaceous compositional pattern of El Greco (cf., *e.g.*, Plate 87). He models units into rounded volumes by way of his use of light and dark, a method of doing that has served and will continue to serve the purpose of constructing volumes in anyone's and everyone's hands. In Benton's hands, where the re-roasting of his borrowings is of surface effects only, little or nothing of a positive nature is accomplished with this device beyond what it is bound to do, *i.e.*, impart a sense of volume. Such failure to make a means serve an individualized end is true to form for an academic and is to be expected of someone—whether a Benton, a Wood, an Effie—incapable of responding with any imaginative penetration to situations in the world. Indeed, that is why, deliberately or not, he steals from others rather than infusing his loot with something new, enriching, his own: all he can see in others are superficial characteristics, and, unable to perceive the underpinnings, he is doomed only to imitate, not to originate: it is the tinselly glitter of the five-and-ten-cent store glass “rock” in its doomed effort to duplicate the deep, lustrous gleam of a diamond, or the rouged cheeks or lips of the girl whose complexion is wanting in liveliness copying, but failing to achieve, the rosy-cheeked complexion of a genuinely healthy girl, or polyester fabric pretending, as it were, to be linen or silk, but lacking, as the academic thing does, what gives to the original thing its distinctive

identity and offering nothing of intrinsic value or quality in exchange.\*

Academicism occurs in a great variety of types and in all fields of art, as well, as we have seen, as in other areas of endeavor. But a certain type of academicism particularly thrives in the field of twentieth-century portraiture. Indeed, anywhere we look, we are likely to find legions of academic portraits—slick assemblages, old-hat relics, faded mementos of what artists were doing in France at the end of the nineteenth century (*e.g.*, Plates 8 and 13), derived from Courbet (*e.g.*, Plate 58), for one, and, in particular, Manet (*e.g.*, Plate 49), but now worked up and over and worked very thin. These academic portrait painters do not live in the present, but in the past, which they attempt to keep alive beyond its time by what amounts to unsuccessful artificial respiration, unsuccessful because they breathe no fresh air into it. They resurrect the ghost of what was at one time alive and full-bodied without even being aware of what is missing: thus do the copy cats of Manet have their idol in Sargent, who, with his own re-roasting of Manet's contributions, is in his portraits (*e.g.*, Plate 7) himself as academic as they come.

What Manet contributed that so appeals to the coterie of his imitators consists in a novel type of broad simplification and a flattening of volumes, both of these achieved much by way of an economical brush work in drawing and modelling which brings out just what is essential to the units so presented, as, for instance, the unit of the nose in "Portrait of a Girl" (Plate 49 and Detail Plate 50) and of the anchor in "Men Tarring Boat" (Plate 113 and Detail Plate 114). But this expressive brush work of Manet deteriorates in Sargent (*e.g.*, Plate 7) and then in Sargent's followers, such as Lavery (*e.g.*, Plate 13) and Sloan (*e.g.*, Plate 119), into a showy skeleton pattern of slick, no longer singly expressive brush strokes. To a trained viewer, one who knows Manet, the imitations of Manet are as sleazy as is the polyester to the person who knows silk: the imitators' brush work does not *make* the units, as does Manet's, but only super-

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\*That polyester is cheaper is not an intrinsic value or quality; in itself, it is sleazy, unyielding, brittle to the touch.



ficially goes through the motions of letting us know that those units are there to be made.

With the preceding, we have looked at a few general earmarks of the academic mentality as it occurs among practitioners of the arts and people in other fields of endeavor. And, just as we had a taste of the every-day version of academicism in action with Effie's arrival on the scene, we shall now sample the version represented by such a painter as Lavery (*e.g.*, Plate 14) by inviting him into one of the rooms at The Barnes Foundation and observing his probable reactions. We shall, of course, generalize about our observations, for, as we know, nobody reacts exactly as anyone else does nor exactly as we shall describe our visitor reacting: our study will take place in the laboratory, as it were, rather than in the clinic, but it will make our point none the less cogently for that.

In he comes. He looks around and sees and takes note of . . . what he has seen and noted before, what he already is familiar with. This is a wholly natural thing to do, for not only is there an ease in taking in what we already know, but there is an undeniable pleasure, an immediately felt satisfaction afforded by coming across the familiar. Familiarity permits recognition and classification, and satisfaction occurs even if the nature of what we have recognized and classified is not in itself pleasurable. That is to say, we derive pleasure from the very act of recognizing. Imagine, for instance, that we are sipping our Vermouth at a Paris café in the summertime, and we suddenly spot in the crowd passing by our neighbor Bob Johnson. "Gee," we exclaim excitedly, "that's Bob Johnson!" We look more closely and see that, sure enough, it is Bob Johnson, and the next second we recall that we still owe him ten dollars or that he is a bore. Nevertheless, there was pleasure in the very process of recognizing him.

Just as we take pleasure in recognizing the familiar, we also are drawn to and take pleasure in coming across what we have not known before, for we enjoy and derive satisfaction from the mind's being alerted and stimulated by what is novel to us. Thus might a non-academic sculptor, upon stepping into the room our academic visitor has entered, look first, perhaps, at the objects in the cases shown on Plate 96, but then look also at the paintings. An artist-painter, on the other hand, would

be likely to go first to the more or less familiar paintings and then to the possibly novel-to-him sculpture. And both might, at some point, be caught by the intriguing novelty of the wrought-iron pieces (Plate 116) or of the hanging of Old Masters and modern painters on the same wall (Plate 32). Or, again, the painting hanging there by Soutine (Plate 16) or Modigliani (Plate 15) may in itself constitute an unknown quantity of the dimensions of a surprise, even, for some, of a shock. To this, the non-academic responds by reserving his judgement until he can find out what the picture is and does.

But now we direct the attention of such a person as Lavery to the Soutine and the Modigliani and (as we could guess from our exposure to Effie, who always “knew” the right time to bring out the toothbrush) he starts off, at the first moment of looking, knowing, so he believes, all there is to know: it is he, after all, who wrote the book. Thus, as his eye lands on the unfamiliar Soutine or Modigliani, he bounces off it as fast as he can and onto any nearby, familiar, and therefore acceptable, object. For, it is an attribute of the academic that he avoids receiving shocks as steadfastly as he avoids giving credence to anything new, anything that departs in the least from the rules, from the expected, the conventional, the particular routine, the run-of-the-mill manner of doing that we earlier saw so well exemplified in Effie’s method of nursing. The novel, as even any suggestion of it did with Effie, upsets his sensibility, and he feels at his happiest when he is taking refuge in the rut of his own making, safely protected there, as he is, by the banks of familiar formulas and well-established rules of behavior, with no disturbing deviations or disconcerting initiative and individuality expressed.

Now our academic visitor accompanies us into another room and sees, accepts for seeing and approval . . . Courbet (Plate 58)? Yes, he will dwell on this painting, admire it, warmly sing its praises, as he will do, too, upon reaching the Tintoretto (Plate 103). He will then pass quickly over the Rousseau (Plate 111) to the Van Goyen (Plate 92) and the French Primitive (Plate 2). When he comes to the Daumier (Plate 59), he will want to praise it, but, seeing those two-toed feet,\* he will raise an eyebrow and

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\*For a discussion of the “two-toed” feet in this Daumier, see Violette de Mazia, “Aesthetic Quality,” *The Barnes Foundation Journal of the Art Department*, Vol. II, No. 1, (Spring, 1971), The Barnes Foundation Press, Merion Station, Pa., pp. 17–27.



pass over it with a mental, if not audible, snicker of contempt at the “inaccurate” drawing and anatomy. The Titian (Plate 55)? Yes, fine, to his liking, as are the Rubens (Plate 94), the El Greco (Plate 36), the Cranach (Plate 9) and the Clouet (Plate 10): no frown does any of these elicit. But when it comes to Renoir’s “The Mussel Gatherers” (Plate 66) and “Two Girls with Charlotte Hats” (Plate 23)—that’s another story. Perspective like that? Flesh that color? No, no! Pooh pooh to that!

To this point, there are, then, a number of paintings among those the academic has seen that he likes, and we, the non-academic, like them, too. One difference between him and us, however, is that he likes only some and rejects those others, and we do not reject the others. Another difference, related to the first, indeed, in part responsible for it, is that his acceptance of certain of the paintings, unlike ours, is based not on the fundamental principles of art, but on a narrow, arbitrary standard of do’s and don’t’s, rights and wrongs, “in” ideas and those that are considered, at least for the moment, passé, all learned from a book, a famous professor or art school teacher or any source with the credentials of authority, or even from his own past successes, which are, ever after, applied with mechanical insensitivity and a lack of perceptiveness to every circumstance come upon. Effie to the life!

What are some of our visitor’s reasons, this type of Courbet-derived academic’s reasons, for liking the paintings he likes? Were we to ask him, we would learn that the paintings he likes have and convey, as his own work does and as all good paintings do and should, a sense of “reality.”\* Reality is a pet word of his, freely bandied about like a shibboleth. And, as happens with any such non-specific, ambiguous, nonobjective term, it is

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\*The answer would vary, of course, according to which era of “art criticism” held sway at the time the question was posed or which school of criticism the academic was “educated” in or what sorts of tricks he had successfully incorporated into his work, and so on. That the answers we supply could be exactly the opposite with another academic responder in no way affects the points made.

Nor should the fact be omitted that there are also eclectic academic painters whose painting fails to crystalize into any distinctive personal identity and who select more than one source in the traditions to emulate the best they can—for instance, in modern times, André Derain, who serves us technically highly competent, nostalgic memories

so indiscriminately used to blanket such a variety of features that we can never really arrive at a sense of its particular significance, let alone challenge its application to a given situation. Thus, in the differentiation between the paintings that our academic visitor accepts and those that he rejects, he lets us know that "reality" stands for a resemblance to things and situations that permits recognition of the subject and that those paintings he likes have it and those he does not like don't. Courbet is fine; but Modigliani, Rousseau, Soutine? Sheer anathema.

Let us stop him to hear him explain himself at the Modigliani (Plate 15). A face? he queries. That? A shocking disgrace! The fact that because of the distortions Modigliani establishes a pattern of varied tones, interesting on their own account—as a composer's variations on a musical motif or a poet's patterning rhymes or beats are intrinsically interesting—escapes him. His preconception, prejudice, judging without trial, is that distortions, under any and all circumstances, are wrong. Yet, while he condemns Modigliani for showing things not as they occur in nature, he accepts from another source a pictured arrangement of fruits and vegetables which have never occurred in nature in their patterned array or grown as close neighbors.

But that is the academic mind, full of illogic. He objects (obstreperously at times, as in the case of Thomas Craven, until recently a well-known and much respected *New York Times* art critic) to Modigliani's distortions, but accepts, in the same breath, the distorted figures in the work of the French Primitive shown on Plate 2 and the Sienese illustrated on Plate 33, in Gozzoli (*e.g.*, Plate 4), Crivelli (*e.g.*, Plate 76) and Clouet (*e.g.*, Plate 10), though the distortions in these result in patterning effects not unlike those that distressed him so in the Modigliani

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of Courbet (*cf.*, *e.g.*, Plates 107 and 108), Cézanne (*cf.*, *e.g.*, Plates 5 and 6), Fantin Latour (*cf.*, *e.g.*, Plates 109 and 110), Corot, (*cf.*, *e.g.*, Plates 121 and 122) and so on. (Incidentally, Dr. Barnes used to warn our students that, when they looked to identify a painting, they first needed to make sure it was not a Derain.) These pictures do not pretend to be, nor are they forgeries of, other men's paintings. Rather, they are meant to be takeoffs, as Derain and the others of his ilk say nothing new and merely appropriate subject, technique, compositional organization, color scheme, etc., from other painters' works. They unabashedly paint *à la*, in the manner of, someone else. And the same is to be said of the general "single-focussed" academic painter this essay primarily addresses.



(Plate 15). He accepts, too, the drawn boundary line in a Botticelli (*e.g.*, Plate 24), which in Modigliani is, again, an unacceptable distortion.

Our academic visitor next rejects a painting by John Kane (Plate 99). First of all, to him it is "like" Rousseau, for he sees only its superficial characteristics, as does the critic who states that "all modern art looks the same to me" (the equivalent of it's all Greek to me?). To him, also, Kane's proportions are all wrong—the heads are too large for the bodies—and the perspective is incorrect, cockeyed, atrocious—the figure which, according to the placement of the feet, stands in front of the others is smaller than those behind it. So the academic condemns the painting. Nevertheless will he most likely, albeit illogically, accept a similar version of this distortion that occurs in the French Primitive "Mary Going to the Temple" (Plate 2), in the German "St. Catherine" (Plate 29) and in Holbein's "Madonna of Burgomaster Meyer" (Plate 65). He would undoubtedly find the early French milking chair reproduced on Plate 70 charmingly quaint, blind to the fact that the chair owes its character to features closely akin to those he objects to in the Kane. For, the chair's proportions are distorted much in the manner of those in the Kane: it has short legs, as of a child, and an adult-sized seat and width of back.

The academic, then, narrow-minded, limited, rigid, sees only what he wants to see or decides he will or should see or, truly, is able to see. Hence these disconcerting contradictions in our visitor's judgements, of which he, of course, is unaware. He disdains the Rousseau (Plate 111): the vegetation, he asserts, should bend more than it is shown doing and be crushed under the weight of the figures. But he admires the Van Goyen (Plate 92), although the boat is made of the same stuff as the water, and he accepts Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus" (Plate 112), although the weight of the figure of Venus should tip the shell.

With Soutine (Plate 16), our visitor gets a jolt in his solar plexus. What an ugly woman! Who could want to paint such a horrible creature? With a woman like her for the subject, the picture is bound to be awful. Yet, there are early Egyptian figures (*e.g.*, Plate 60) that he likes, for all that they have "piano" legs, and those of the early Italian tradition (*e.g.*, Plate 67), for all that the character and location of the features are "off."

Similarly with Cranach (*e.g.*, Plate 9) and Ghirlandaio (*e.g.*, Plate 25), neither painted Adonises, nor did Goya (*e.g.*, Plate 35) in his rendition of the smug countenances of the royal family of Spain, but none of these painters relinquishes the admiration of the academic for that. But the hand in the Soutine? Contemptuously he points to the size of *that* finger and decries its misdrawing, its lack of proportion, while the finger in the German "St. Catherine" (Plate 29), the leg of Christ in Tintoretto's "Christ and the Woman of Samaria" (Plate 103) and the man's shoulder in Titian's "Man and Son" (Plate 55) all pass muster. These latter are all recognized as Old Masters, whom our visitor sets great store by and about whom he would not think of seeing or saying anything amiss. The fact that the distortions in the Soutine allow the artist to create, to establish, an intrinsically interesting movement of forceful directions, of thrust and counterthrust, has no chance at all of being perceived.

What about the perspective in the Soutine? is the next accusatory observation we would hear. Why, it's all awry, askew. But just as awry and askew is the perspective in the French and Spanish Primitives (*e.g.*, Plates 2 and 28), which for our visitor are, needless to say, of the first water. He sneers at the perspective in Cézanne's "Fruit and Tapestry" (Plate 93) and in Renoir's "The Mussel Gatherers" (Plate 66), in which the land and water are shown as seen from above and the figures as if seen head-on; and the color in late Renoir paintings (*e.g.*, Plate 123) is not flesh color, not concocted of rose madder and yellow ochre, or whatever the academic's formula calls for to make the "correct" shade. Or of Renoir's "Woman with Fan" (Plate 18), that isn't flesh! Renoir just can't paint flesh! It's porcelain. And the flesh in Soutine is simply . . . ghastly. However, the academic does not bat an eye at the non-fleshlike flesh in Rubens (*e.g.*, Plate 94), Veronese (*e.g.*, Plate 31), Titan (*e.g.*, Plate 55), Tintoretto (*e.g.*, Plate 103), the waxy, jaundiced flesh in Courbet (*e.g.*, Plate 58), the earthy, ashen-gray flesh of a Spanish Primitive (*e.g.*, Plate 28), the alabaster flesh of Clouet (*e.g.*, Plate 10), the pasty wax-flesh in Cranach (*e.g.*, Plate 9), and, in Rembrandt (*e.g.*, Plate 56), the flesh being of the color of the garments.

The academic we have been following accepts in one painting what he condemns in another for three main general reasons.



First is that familiarity tends to allow us to accept something automatically because it tends to make us blind to what that thing really is: the Old Masters and the Primitives were familiar to our academic visitor long before he met up with Soutine. Another factor that comes in to reinforce the effect of familiarity is the prestige of authority,\* the factor, incidentally, that is responsible for many a museum's or collector's spending of vast sums of money on a painting: it is not the work, but the artists' names that these acquirers are buying; it is the fact that the paintings have been sanctioned as Old Masters that they are paying for. A third factor results from the difference in the circumstances and requirements of the Old Masters *vs.* modern practitioners: in earlier times, the artist was obliged to include in his work certain things—the telling of a story or recording of an event, for example, with sufficient likeness achieved in the depiction of the participants for the viewer to identify them—that became for one type of academic (there is a type for every school and “ism” in art, not to mention for every other walk of life) an arbitrary requisite. These things were required because art served in part the purpose later served by the printing press and the camera. And it is the fact that the artist, in some measure, did function as a recorder, that he produced, in general, a likeness to things known that, in large measure, causes our academic type of visitor to overlook, actually to fail to see, the departures from factual literalness which co-exist with the likenesses produced, even in the face of the fact that these departures are of the sort that he derides in others less familiar to him or less concerned with producing an actual likeness. (Effie likewise recognized in the nursing interaction solely the facts she had been trained to look for.)

The effect of the three factors—familiarity, authority, recognizability—as they operate in *this* type of academic's judgement of works of art is to produce blindness rather than understanding, and any correspondence between art merit and the academic's approval is purely accidental. It remains true, however, that the yardstick of academicism has varied dramatically with

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\*Effie, too, clothed herself in the authority and prestige of her uniform.

times and places and among different groups of critics and painters at a certain time and place.

Needless to say, there are all kinds and degrees of in-betweens both in the field of painting and in that of nursing, as well as elsewhere: the not-so-very academic, yet academic, the not-so-very creative, yet creative. There are, of course, also, and fortunately so, the creative personalities in painting, nursing and elsewhere, *i.e.*, those individuals who adapt the traditions, the dictums of the most recent book, the accepted and approved code, to their own needs and produce something new, personal, albeit based on the code, the textbook, the traditions. They are, as we said before, rare, but they are there. Whereas, on the other side of the coin thrive the academics who, although different from each other, adopt the best they can what they find that's in the book, the code, the traditions. They are, again as we said before, not rare, and they are there. And the flocks of sheep . . . clutter up the field and mislead. For the fact is, indeed, that all that's painted is not art.

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**Then as Now . . .**  
**Twelve Months Add Up to One Year**

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*The Calendar from  
The Book of Hours of  
The Duke of Berry\**

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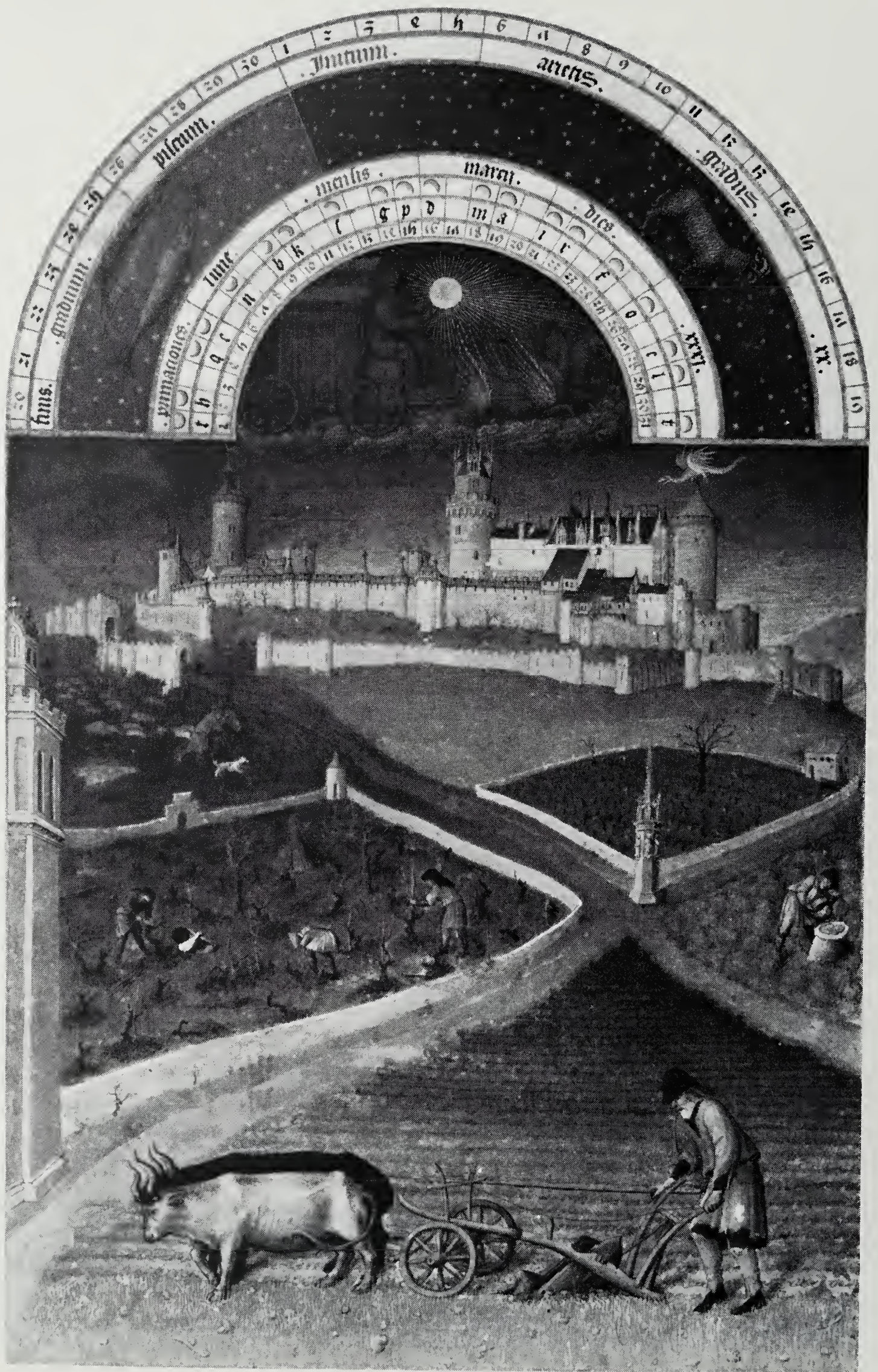
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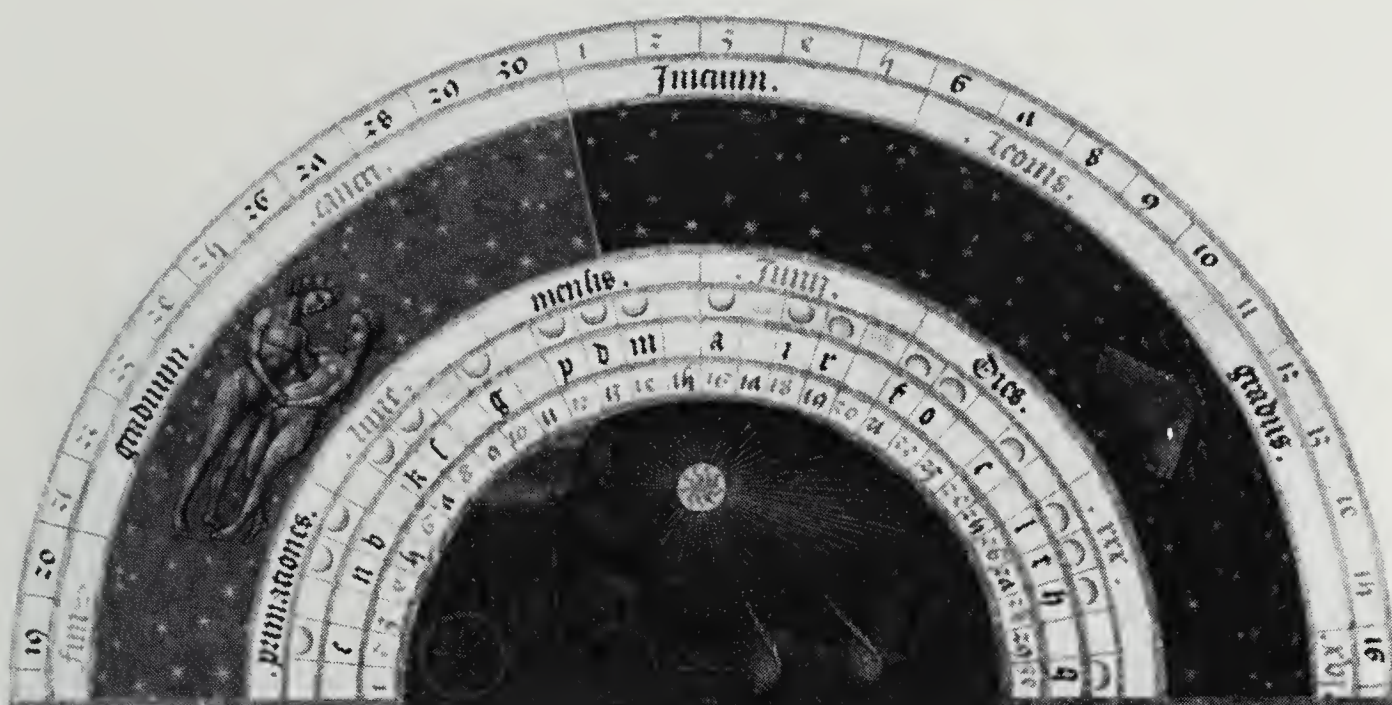


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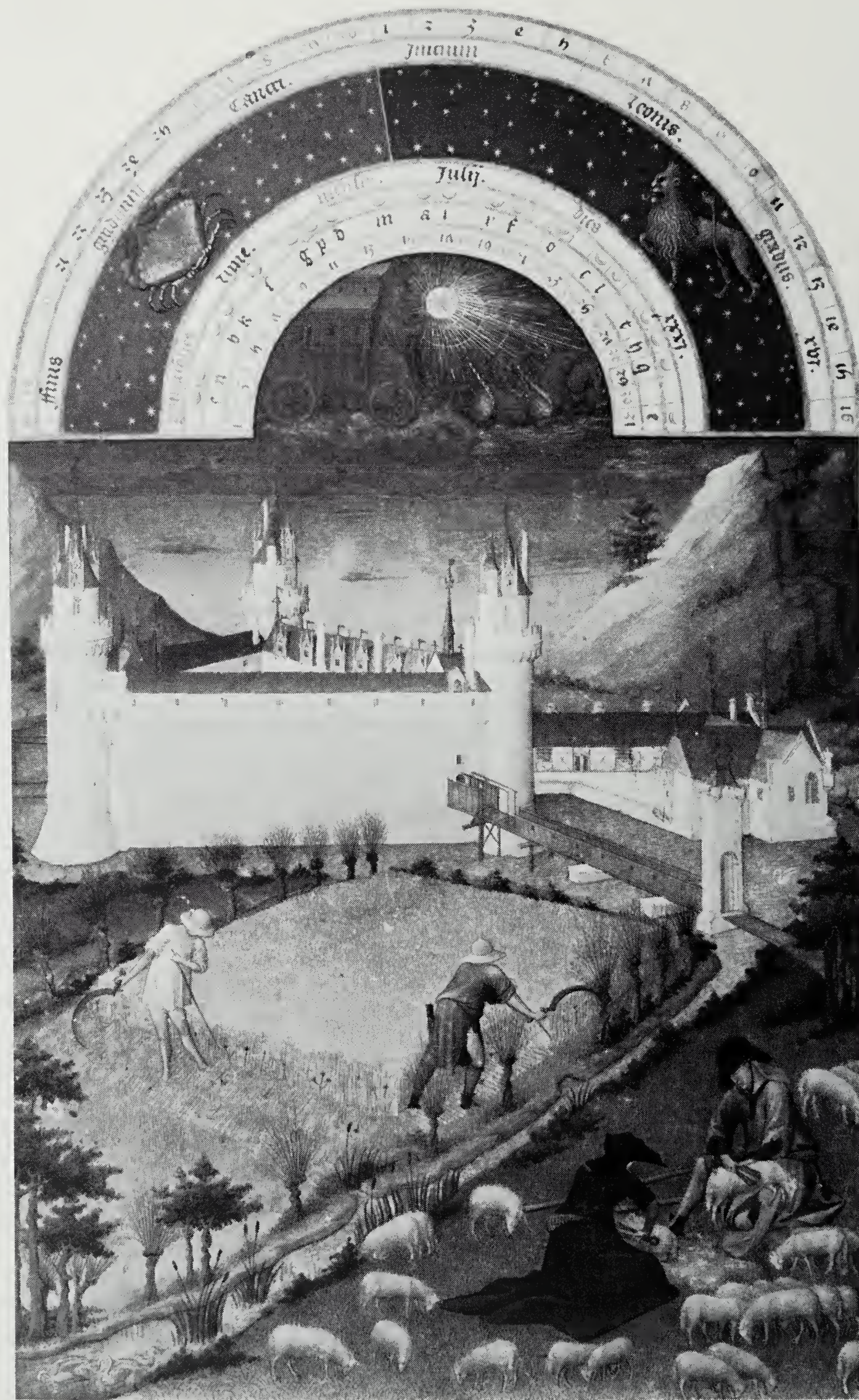






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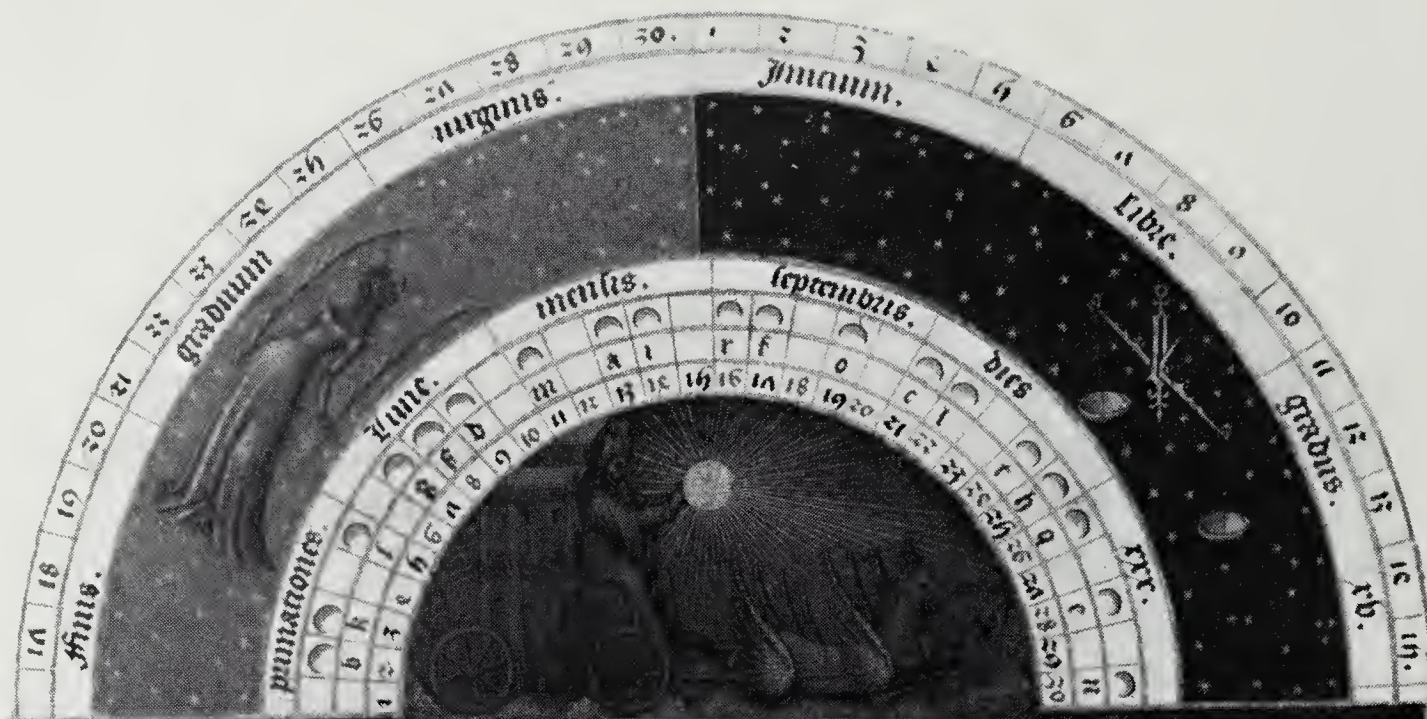
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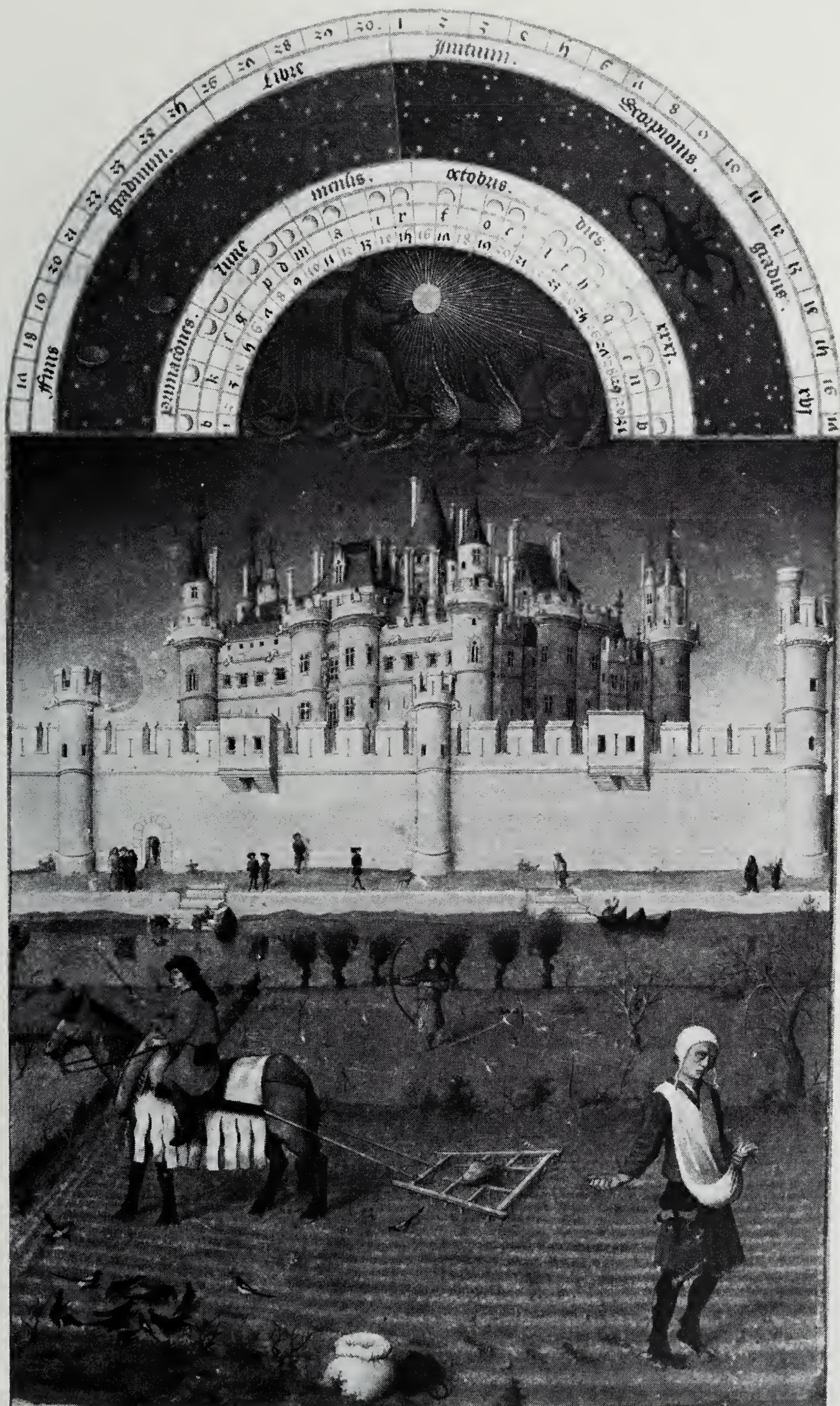
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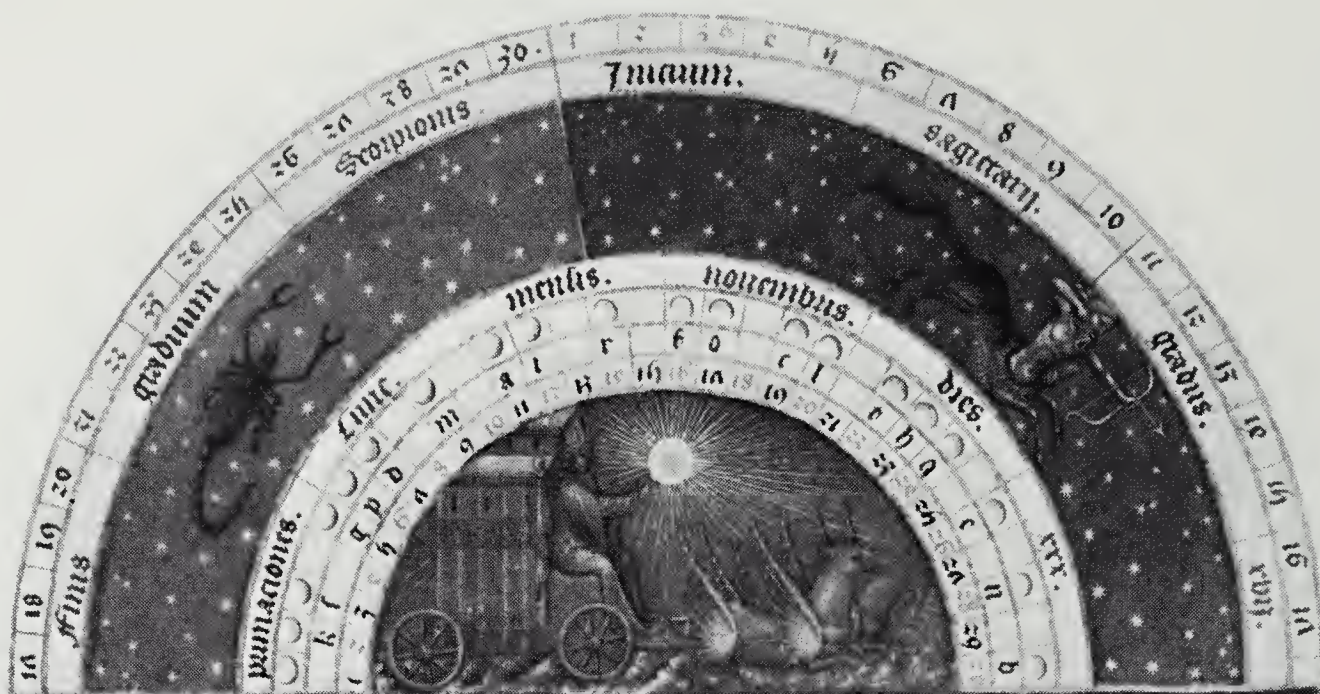
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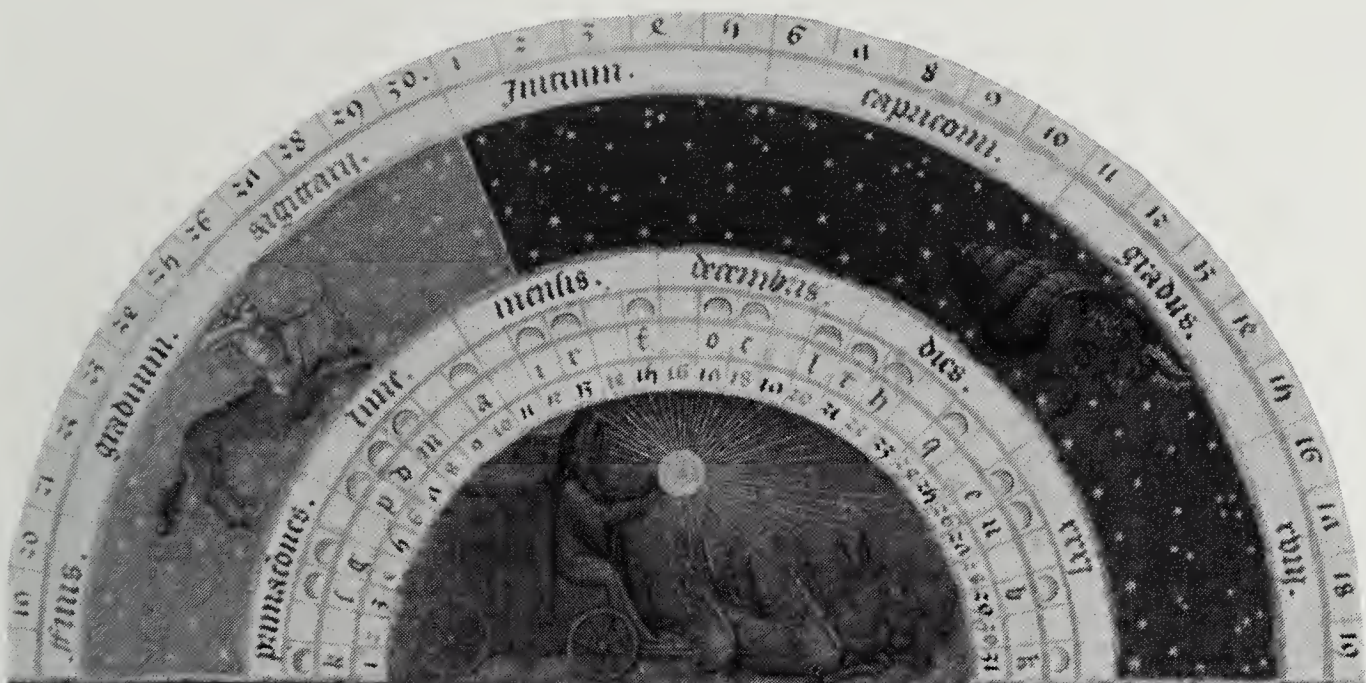
October





November





December







# **A Legitimate Complaint**

**Against the Unforgivable  
and Irreparable  
Culprit—Time**

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# A Complaint Against Time

*by* Norman Gentieu\*

Thou constant wanton variable Time,  
So careless with thy life and ours;  
Why hasten to discard thy prime?  
Why waste the splendid hours?

An ancient envy of love's delight  
Within thy heartless soul must dwell,  
Thee keeps thy gauges seldom right  
As lovers know too well.

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\*Member of the Seminar of The Barnes Foundation Art Department.







# The Nature of Form\*

by Violette de Mazia\*\*

*From art's standpoint,  
"matter without form  
has no meaning for us,  
and form without matter is  
too abstract to interest us."†*

Whenever we analyze a picture, or, for that matter, anything, *with reference to its identity per se*, we analyze its form. Indeed, the concept of form involves the totality, the distinctive makeup, the "itness" of a thing or situation, no less the things and situations of daily life than those offered by that aspect of life that is art.

Somehow, in the case of painting, as the term "form" is generally used it has been corrupted and arbitrarily made to stand for only part of the totality it comprises. It is often confused with the terms "shape," "pattern," "format," etc., or it is employed to designate the style, the drawing or the three-dimensionality or the compositional organization of the picture units. In actuality, however, form embraces these and much more, for it involves, as we stated, the totality that is brought about by the organization of *all* the essential constituents—essential, that is, to our interest—and their interrelationships that make

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\*The material of this essay was adapted from the author's class lectures in the Art Department of The Barnes Foundation.

\*\*Director of Education of The Barnes Foundation Art Department.

†Mary Mullen, *An Approach to Art*, The Barnes Foundation Press, Merion, Pa., 1923, p. 16.



up an object or a situation. It further involves the identity of that totality *as considered from a particular point of view*, such as the aesthetic point of view or the psychological or the decorative or the illustrative, and so forth.

Though our attention will be on form in painting from the aesthetic point of view, there is, as has been implied, no justification for expecting form to stand for one thing when it refers to situations of daily life and for something else when it refers to aesthetic situations, or situations we identify as art.

What we shall do first is to show up the wrong and, therefore, misleading uses of the term "form" in reference to art and how such uses are inadequate to the task of understanding paintings, but, instead, promote only confusion. In the course of this undertaking, we will see that whatever form is in any kind of situation is what it is in art and that failure or success concerning form in art is, therefore, to be determined in no other way than is failure or success concerning form in any kind of situation.

A visitor to a museum is likely to have overheard people using the term "form" in this sense: Titian (*e.g.*, Plate 55) has a better sense of form than Botticelli (*e.g.*, Plate 112)—said with accompanying hand gestures seeming to outline a sphere, as a sort of unconscious concession that the terminology fails to do justice to the idea. That, perhaps, is the most frequently met misuse of "form," and it is wrong on not just one, but two, counts. First, it makes form synonymous with three-dimensionality, bulk, volume, which it is not. Second, the misuse itself is cast as a judgement of good and bad, right and wrong, have and have-not, as if three-dimensionality (or the illusion of it) in and of itself has it all over two-dimensionality, a judgement that is misleading even in the case of sculpture.

Three-dimensionality, illusory or actual, does, of course, offer possibilities of effects not to be found in two-dimensional presentations, but, always, it is the expressive intent or ultimate purpose that determines what actually is made of those possibilities. For Cézanne (*e.g.*, Plate 93), for instance, three-dimensionality provides the basis for the power of stable, weighty volumes beating a rhythm in deep space. In the case of Tintoretto (*e.g.*, Plate 103), it is a means of saying power of dramatic



sweeps of weighty volumes beating a rhythm in deep space. In Henri Rousseau's work (*e.g.*, Plate 19), it serves the artist's naïveté and is instrumental in his unusually decorative expression of space as a setting for a compact pattern of subject units. For Renoir (*e.g.*, Plate 123), three-dimensionality gives substance to a voluptuous color richness.

On the other hand, three-dimensionality can just as surely subvert aesthetic merit, as it does for those who are preoccupied with bulk as a thing in itself, as *the* thing to get at all costs. This is what happens in the overly dramatic work of some late Italians and late Flemish, and also of the modern painters Thomas Hart Benton (*e.g.*, Plate 89) and, at times, Fernand Léger (*e.g.*, Plate 22), in, that is, the work of those painters who accent the light-and-dark modelling at the expense of color, producing a mechanical, artificial effect that is all that there is.

Since art and life are inseparable and since art is a fragment of life intensified and enriched by the artist's insight into the aesthetic, *i.e.*, the intrinsically and intellectually sensuous, aspects of broad human qualities, there is no logic in considering bulk the end-all of art or as *the* aspect that at all times in all circumstances enriches life. There is no reason, in fact, for bulk to be the basis for a criterion at all, particularly in the case of an art in which the medium of expression is color. Three-dimensionality may help or, just as often, may ruin a situation, according to where it is used, what for and how. It would ruin, for instance, what Marsden Hartley (*e.g.*, Plate 20), in general, does and Manet (*e.g.*, Plate 57) and Matisse (*e.g.*, Plate 82) and the Oriental artists (*e.g.*, Plate 69). In Hartley, Manet, Matisse and the Oriental artists, there is no fault to find with the flatness of their picture units: flatness achieves an effect interesting in itself, an effect of silhouetted shapes, which effect would be out of reach through the use of bulky volumes.

Besides, in truth, form and bulk are simply not synonymous. In other situations when we use the term "form," we clearly do not mean "bulk" (bulk may play a part in what we mean, but a part of a thing is never that thing). We find, for instance, "form" used a number of times in headlines from newspapers, in none of which occurrences could "bulk" serve as a replacement: "Jack Claffery Displaying Form That Won the Catholic League Diving Honors" and "Winning Trick of Egestone Dis-



plays Form Which Won Best of Scottish Terrier Breed at the Westminster” and “Mrs. Donald Stone Admires the Prize-Winning Form of Her Bloodhound.” Or, when we say of a track runner that he is in fine form or that one baseball pitcher is in finer form than another, we do not refer particularly or only to his bulk, but to a number of characteristics—mental and emotional as well as physical—as they function together for what is required of the runner, of the pitcher according to the particular situation of the event or game. To determine the form of the runner, we would consider the coordination of such contributory factors as his litheness, his breathing, his endurance, because the intent, the purpose he strives to realize is always the clue to his form. Bulk, too, is considered, but only according to purpose, for, while it may be good for one person, it could be the ruination of another: for the fat woman at the circus it is fine, but not for the runner.

Form is also always the consequence of the use made of whatever plays a part in giving the runner, the pitcher, or whoever his identity. A pitcher does not just pitch a ball. He sizes up a situation, knows who is at bat, who is on base, who is ready to come to bat and what is needed for the overall circumstance. Then he brings his entire machinery as a pitcher—visual, mental, physical—into play, including whatever his bulk may supply of needed strength to achieve what is required. If he succeeds, he has, he is in, fine form.

It may be that the pitcher is excellent in all factors individually: he can judge the kind of ball needed; he can throw a fast ball, a curve, a strike or just a ball, and he throws, with the bases loaded, an ideal pitch for . . . a homerun. In other words, he falls down, not on any one factor that makes him a pitcher, but on the specific relationships among the factors needed then and there. Figuratively speaking, his right hand does not know what his left hand is doing: there is a lack of teamwork with regard to purpose. We would say of him that he is not in form, his form is not good, and his form as we mean it, good, bad or indifferent, has hardly a thing to do with his bulk.

To cite another example, Kate Smith and Lily Pons had very different forms as singers, and, again, we do not mean bulk, although it played a part in determining their form. Kate Smith’s form emerged from such coordinated factors as her



low register, the hominess of her diction, her repertoire, the warmth of her voice and its timbre, due in part to the size of her sound box and to the fact that it was housed in a bulky physique. The form of Lily Pons as a singer emerged from the coordination of her soprano register, her fluty, decorative, pear-shaped, coloratura notes, her polished diction, her dainty sound power, due in part to the fact that her sound box was diminutive and was lodged in a physique of diminutive bulk.

There is another corrupt use of form that we have probably all heard at one time or other in either or both of two versions, basically the same. With one version, we would hear something like this: Soutine (*e.g.*, Plate 16), Renoir in his late work (*e.g.*, Plate 123), Matisse (*e.g.*, Plate 82) distort the form of things, and Grant Wood (*e.g.*, Plate 26), Crivelli (*e.g.*, Plate 76), the Dutch or Flemish still life painters (*e.g.*, Plate 88) retain their form. Here, form is being used to mean shape, specifically, the shape of the subject facts, and, in the same breath, to justify placing Grant Wood and Crivelli way above Soutine, Renoir and Matisse as artists—an act comparable to placing the daily newspaper, with all its attention to factual detail, above Shakespeare as literature.

In a similar vein, we might hear that Oriental “forms,” referring to the bands, rosettes and arabesques found in Oriental work (*e.g.*, Plate 81), are frequently used by Matisse (*e.g.*, Plate 82), with the meaning of form now including decorative motifs, patterns, as well as shapes.

It is true that form, in its legitimate sense, may include pattern and that a pattern has a form: there is, for instance, the pattern, with *its* form, of the swing of arms and body in the form of the baseball pitcher as a pitcher and of the runner as a runner; there is the follow-through pattern, and *its* form, in the form of the golfer as a golfer; there is the arabesque pattern in space, and *its* form, in the form of the skier as a skier, of the dancer as a dancer, of the skater as a skater; but, in each case, that pattern is *not* his or her form—*i.e.*, the totality of his or her identity—as a pitcher, a runner, a golfer, a skier, a dancer, a skater: a pitcher may use a perfect pitching pattern and . . . send the ball to the wrong side of the batter.

In music, we can differentiate among the clean-cut pattern, and *its* form, of Mozart, the gliding pattern, and *its* form, of



Glück, the plaited pattern, and *its* form, of Bach, but these characteristics alone do not differentiate the respective forms of these composers as composers. In literature, there is the simple pattern, and *its* form, of Anatole France or Ernest Hemmingway and the complex pattern, and *its* form, of Marcel Proust or Aldous Huxley, but we cannot from those facts alone determine the various forms of these writers as writers. As Dr. Barnes has noted, "Pattern is merely the skeleton upon which plastic units embodying the universal human values of experience are engrafted,"\* although, as he goes on in effect to say, it is often confused by the "professional" art critics with "significant form."

Still another abuse of the term "form" comes with an attitude that a certain manner of doing, of painting, is acceptable, and all other manners of doing, of painting, are taboo. In this instance, form is made to stand for some pet recipe or formula or style (manner of doing) to which a painter had better conform if he is to make it in the art world: he must adhere to the Non-Objectives' "form" (formula) of triangles, squares and circles on a two-dimensional plane or to the New Hope (a misnomer if ever there was one) painters' "form," which consists in painting with the leftovers of Impressionism, or to the Expressionists', the Minimalists', the Realists', etc., "form." All of these schools of painting do have a form, but that form is not to be found, as this use of the term implies, solely as a technique or subject utilized and required by the school or as a mold of any sort into which the artist's expression must fit.

Now we are ready to look at the meaning of form for what it actually is. As we implied in our earlier discussion of the baseball pitcher, form is not to be perceived by simply taking an inventory of all the characteristics of a thing or situation, but, rather, by taking an inventory of the *relationships* of all the factors involved in the thing or situation that are relevant to the end in view, the intent of their exercise. Form, that is, as

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\*Albert C. Barnes, *The Art in Painting*, 3rd ed. rev., Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York, 1937, p. 61.



already noted, results from the coordination of relevant factors according to and for the sake of a specific purpose.

When it comes to a painting, its form is . . . itself (the painting) understood. Its form, in other words, is its identity perceived as and understood to be the result of relationships of all its constituents as those relationships are governed by the artist's intent. Obviously, then, to say that a picture lacks form or that there are breaks in its form does not necessarily mean that we think it lacks three-dimensionality or that its technique departs from a preordained standard, but, instead, that it lacks that synthesizing coordination of its constituents which would crystallize into a definite, complete aesthetic identity. And, since form accounts for the purposive organization of the plastic means, it is logical to refer to it in art as *plastic* form, in both senses of plastic, *i.e.*, in the sense that it has been made to be what it is and in the sense that it has altered the identity of the things that come under its domain.

The fact that a thing has form is not a proof of or synonymous with its having aesthetic merit: Benton's pictures (*e.g.*, Plate 89) have a form, namely, the form of an academic painting;\* the baseball pitcher who throws the ball to the outfield has a form, *i.e.*, the form of a pitcher gone berserk or playing a prank. Indeed, pictures whose form has a hole can tower way above pictures with hole-less form: Renoir's "Woman in Landscape" (Plate 123) and Cézanne's "Nude Seated on Bank" (Plate 75) have it all over Benton from the standpoint of aesthetic expression, despite the fact that, in the Renoir, an area on the skirt breaks with the continuity of the overall scintillating color pattern and that, in the Cézanne, the bit of background water appearing between the figure's left arm and head comes forward of the plane of the background. The important point in all this is, of course, that the significance and quality of any form depends on the significance and quality of *what* is organized—the matter—as well as *how* that matter is organized and *why* and by *whom*.

Closely connected with the preceding is that form is not some-

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\*For a discussion of Benton's painting as academic, see pp. 25–26 in this issue of VISTAS.



thing applied on matter to make it be one way or another; for that we would use a mold. Rather, and to repeat in the simplest of terms, form comes into being from specific matter occurring in specific relationships. There is, for example, the sixteenth-century Italian folding chair shown on Plate 38, and there was its mate, now dismantled into a pile of wood (Plate 37). The matter in both cases is more or less the same, but the relationships among the constituents of each differ, hence also does their form. Likewise, among a group of artist-painters' and artist-sculptors' pieces all having a similar subject—either a single Madonna or a large and smaller representative of a same species—each will have its own form, distinct from that of any of the others, with one or more from the array of components particularly responsible for the outstanding feature of the total entity. Thus, there is the Santo "Madonna with Clasped Hands" (Plate 44), done in the nineteenth century by a native New Mexican artist. The distinctive features of the identity of its form come from the relationships between the black-and-white effect of the colors, Spanish in origin, and the bright colors of the Mexican and American Indian traditions. With the twelfth-century wooden Madonna shown on Plate 54 (once painted in polychrome and having the Child, frontally posed, seated on its lap), the primary characteristics of its form are a fixed rigidity that lends a dignity to the piece, a solid, stable, one-piece effect of the block from which it was carved and the frontal presentation of the figure. A salient feature of the form of the single figure in the French sixteenth-century stone "Mater Dolorosa" (Plate 53) is that of the relationships between its flattened volume and the quiet curvature of its bulk. The character of the form of the "Madonna and Child" shown on Plate 73 owes much to its dominant feature of a self-contained organization of the volumes. The outstanding element of the form of the "Madonna and Child" reproduced on Plate 74 is the dramatic, indeed, somewhat over-dramatic, contrast created by the horizontal placement of the figure of the Child. The New Mexican Bulto reproduced on Plate 43 has as distinctive features of its form the flattened volumes, the naïveté of the rendering, the Spanish-derived color scheme and the rigid curving-towards-each-other relationship of the two figures. Renoir's "Mother and Child" (Plate 71)—this piece was literally "dictated" by Re-



noir to Guino, a young sculpture student of Maillol's, in Renoir's late years, when Renoir's hands were too crippled to mold clay—is sculpturesque in its blocklike three-dimensionality, its form being one of volumes embracing volumes (the main volumes hold the child, as well as each other); at the same time, however, its form loses of its sculptural character because of an overplaying of the surface pattern (Plate 72), which is not unlike the effect of brush strokes on canvas. Indeed, Renoir had earlier painted this subject on several occasions, and Guino used the paintings as a supplemental guide. Again, the form of Picasso's "Mother and Child" (Plate 83) of 1943 is dominated both by a pattern of grayish and pinkish-ivory shapes dramatically contrasted to each other, with subtly enlivening touches of color here and there and with a pattern which recalls Picasso's earlier forays into Cubism, as well as by the looming effect of the figure at the back, which effect recalls a similar idea in one of his works of 1922–23 (Plate 84). With the magazine illustration "Wings Over the World" (Plate 42), the form is characterized by the particularly set, three-dimensional, pyramidal relationships among the three main units—one child in front of the mother and the other in back of her, with the larger figure of the mother sandwiched between the two in a receding space—an organization not unlike that of the Child, the Madonna and the background shadow in Bellini's "Madonna and Child" (Plate 77) or that of the similarly related picture units in Gerard David's "Madonna and Child" (Plate 78) and, in another, novel, way, that of the two figures and the background chair in Coleman Homsey's "Doli and Ellen" (Plate 41). And, finally, the "mother" ladder-back chair with the "child" ladder-back chair (a small one of the same species) on her lap shown on Plate 40—together they have a form, either of furniture at house-cleaning time, if we look at them from that point of view, or of interlocking, overlapping geometrical units related to each other by their placement at specific intervals . . . which could be the start of an aesthetic form for an artist.

We have arrived at a general understanding of what form is not and what it is. It is not shape; it is not a style; it is not volume; it is not a formula—although each of these, if it has an identity, has a form. Rather, form is the identity that comes



into being and is perceived as the result of matter specifically selected, used and organized according to and for the sake of a specific design. That is to say, form is the result of “what” (the matter), “how” it gets that way (the relationships established) and “why” (the idea), and, of course, involves who and his time and place, all of which is intermeshed. Consequently can we have the same or very similar “how” and not the same form because not the same “why” and, therefore, not the same “what”—as happens, for example, with Titian’s “Entombment” (Plate 102) and Cézanne’s “Still Life with Gray Jug” (Plate 101).<sup>\*</sup> Likewise can we have the same or very similar “what” and a very different form on account of the differences in the “why”—that is to say, the same matter organized differently produces a different form—as we saw above with the Italian folding chair and its disassembled mate or could we see with our own living room when we rearrange the furniture to accommodate a large party of guests. Perhaps even more graphically illustrative of this point is the example provided by George Santayana of the same ten lines (the same matter) arranged in different ways (differently related) so that an assortment of faces, each with a different expression (see Plates 61, 62, 63, and 64), and, therefore, not the same identity of the result, or form, is produced.

To put it succinctly, then, form is matter organized for a purpose. But there is also this that must be taken into account, that everything that has identity has a form. Thus, what is matter to form, if identifiable, also has its own form. A human being, for instance, has an overall form as a living, thinking, acting, sentient creature, yet also a form of more limited scope as, perhaps, the baseball pitcher we earlier singled out, a wage earner, a paterfamilias, a holder of certain ideas, a repository of other living organisms, and also a form resulting from a blood and body type, a set of physical attributes, a record of

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<sup>\*</sup>These paintings are both organized in the terms of a pronounced downward-dipping unit in the center foreground, with enframing side units and a central upright pyramid in the background. But, in part because of the differences in the matter that makes up the respective compositions, the expressive content of each, the overall identity or “itness,” is something specific and unique to it alone. (This comparison is made in somewhat more detail and from a slightly different, but related, point of view in Violette de Mazia’s article “Subject and Subject Matter: Part III,” *VISTAS*, Vol. III, No. 1, 1984–1986, The V.O.L.N. Press, Merion Station, Pa., p. 10.)



achievement in school, and so forth. To arrive at the identity of any and all of these forms, we would consider, each time, other matter, for what we look at will vary according to the point of interest we bring to bear. And this point of interest functions as the guiding, focussing factor in our perception in the same way as does the aesthetic intent of an artist's piece serve as the guiding, focussing factor in the matter selected and in the relationships established.

Another way of saying what we have just said is that we can consider the form of an aspect or part of a total form. As in the case of a human being who may be viewed in that aspect of his totality which is identifiable as "baseball pitcher" or "good in math," so in a painting can we consider the form of, for instance, the decorative aspect, the expressive, the illustrative, the technical, or, in fact, the form of any identifiable, separable element, down to the smallest of a perceivable single brush stroke or speck of color. Thus does the Windsor chair shown on Plate 39 have a form that results from the specific relationships of all the matter that confers the identity of a Rhode Island Windsor chair upon it, and, by the same token, does its leg or spindle have a form of its own resulting from the relationships of *its* matter—the wood, the turnings, the length, the width, the shape—as does also the wood in that leg or spindle have a form of its own, and so on. However, the total form of the chair does not come about from considering the forms of each aspect or part and then adding them all up together—that would give us a bundle, not the chair with *its* form—but from looking at all of those aspects and parts, now from the point of view of the identity of the totality of the chair and the how, what and why of that. As we have stressed all along, what applies to the form of a chair or a human being applies, of course, equally to the form of a painting: we would have to consider the form of the drawing, of the technique, of the space, of the color, etc., and then . . . not add them up, for that would give us a "bundle," but see the outcome of their specific interrelationships.



Form, then, to say it once more for the sake of emphasis, is matter organized for a purpose. Clearly, as we stressed at the outset, from the standpoint of art, “matter without form [that is, not organized from an aesthetic viewpoint] means nothing to us, and form without matter is too abstract to interest us.”\*

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For the next issue of VISTAS, we propose to make an analytical survey of one of Seurat’s major works, “The Models.”

---

\*Mary Mullen, *ibid.*



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Van Eyck

*The Arnolfini Wedding*  
(National Gallery, London—Photograph:  
Marburg/Art Resource, New York)—Page 20





French  
Fifteenth Century

*Mary Going to the Temple*  
—Pages 29, 31, 32, 33





El Greco

*Annunciation*  
—Pages 21–22





Benozzo Gozzoli  
Florentine, Fifteenth Century

*Madonna and Child*  
—Pages 20, 31



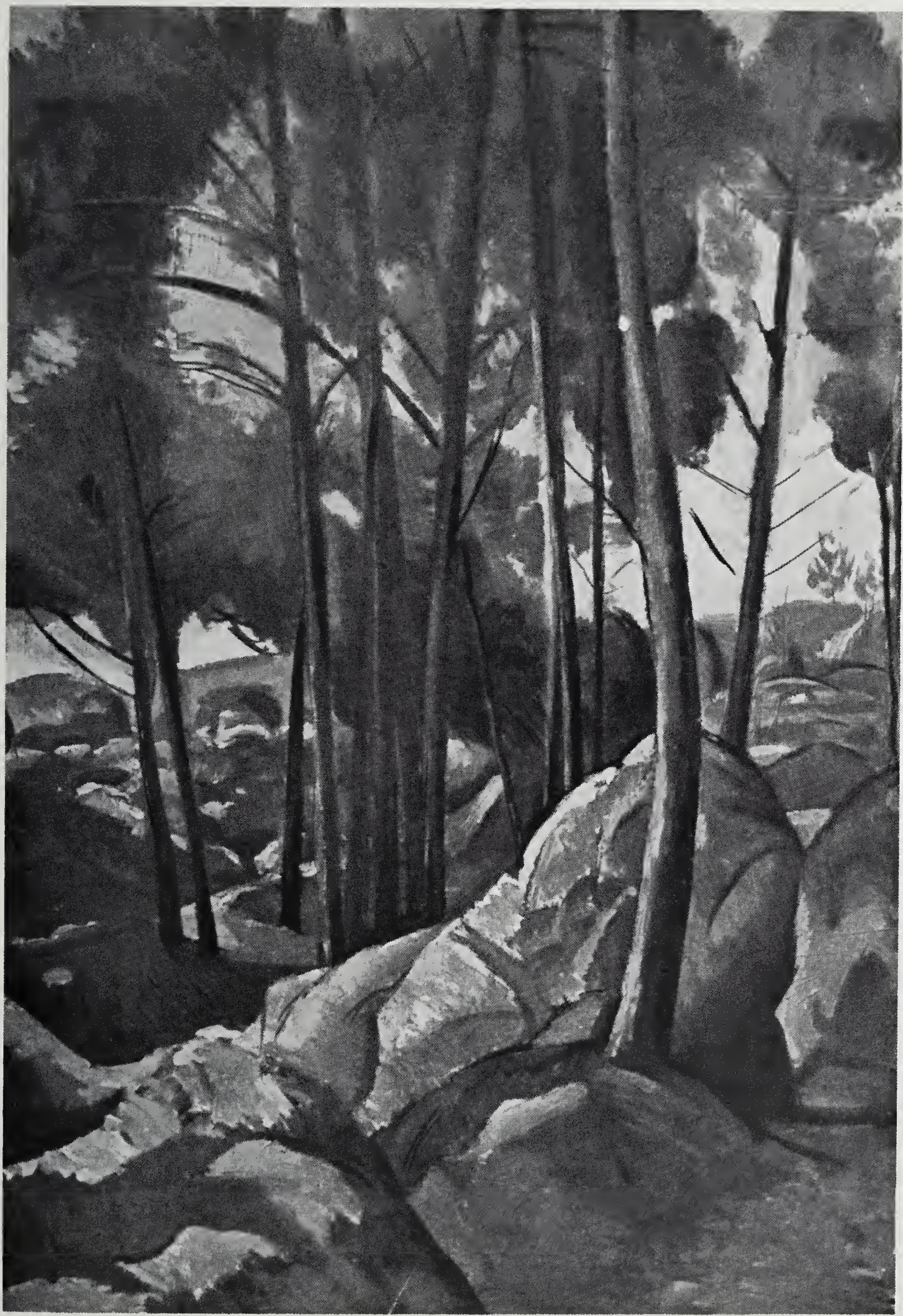
PLATE 5



Cézanne

*The Viaduct*  
(Museum of Modern Art, Moscow—Photograph:  
Giraudon/Art Resource, New York)—Page 31 ftn





Derain

*Forest Fontainebleau*  
(Museum of Modern Art, Moscow—Copyright: Artists  
Rights Society, New York/ADAGP, 1988)—Page 31 ftn



PLATE 7



Sargent

*Portrait of a Girl*  
(Present ownership unknown)—Page 27





Robert Henri

*Dutch Girl in White*  
(The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.  
Arthur H. Hearn Fund, 1950)—Pages 18, 27



PLATE 9



Cranach

*Portrait of a Man*  
—Pages 30, 33





François Clouet

*Portrait of a Woman*  
—Pages 22, 30, 31, 33

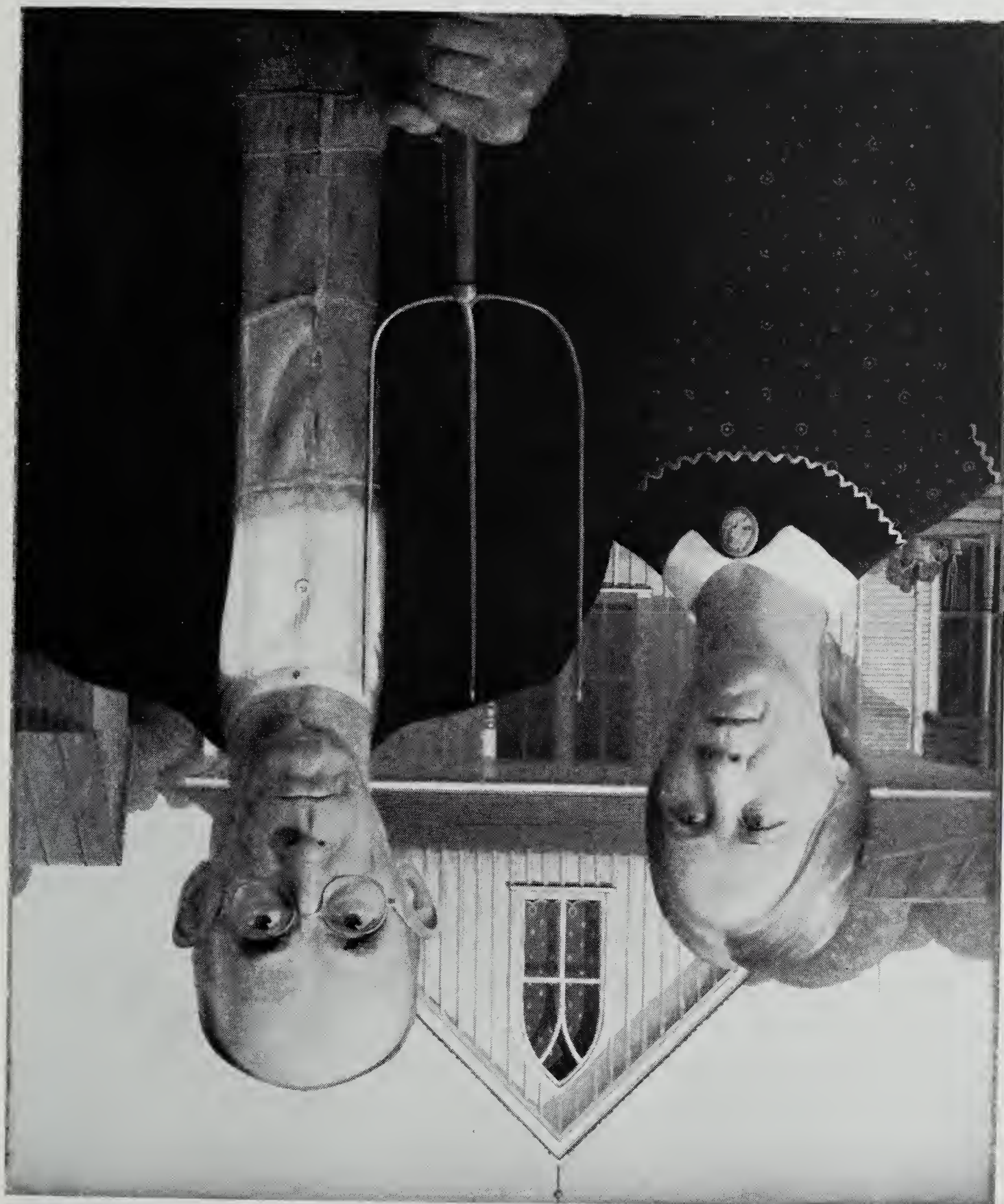




Ghirlandaio

*Francesco Sassetti and His Son Teodoro*  
(The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.  
The Jules Bache Collection, 1949.—49.7.7. All rights reserved,  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art)—Page 20





Grant Wood

*American Gothic* 1930, (upside down)  
(Copyright 1988 The Art Institute of Chicago.  
All rights reserved—Friends of American Art Collection)—Page 23





Lavery

*Woman in Lavender*  
(Present ownership unknown)—Page 27





Lavery

*Woman in Black*  
(Present ownership unknown)—Pages 18, 28





Modigliani

*Boy in Sailor Suit*  
—Pages 29, 31–32



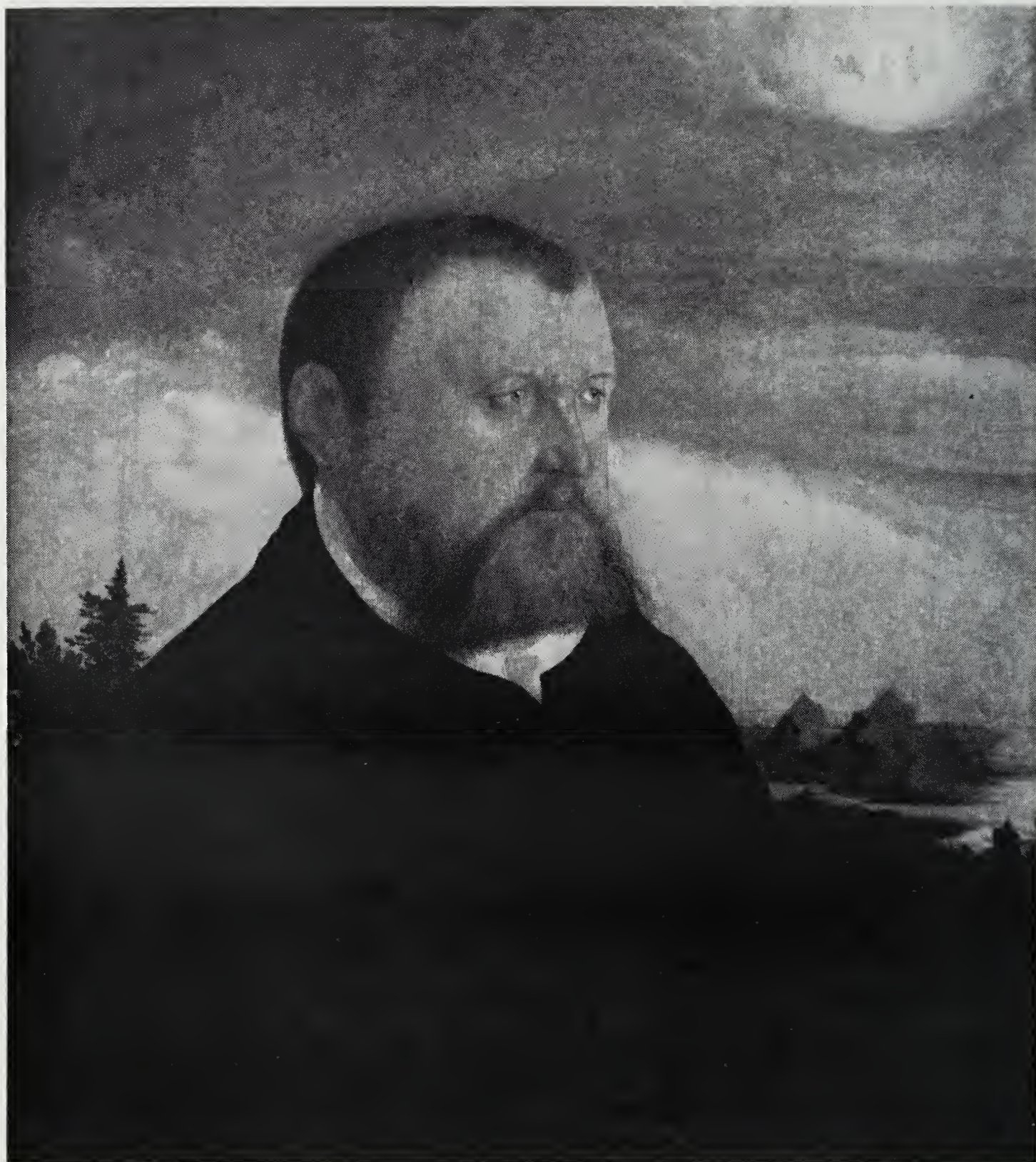


Soutine

*Woman with Hat*  
—Pages 21–22, 29, 32–33, 59



PLATE 17



Huber

*Portrait of a Man*  
—Pages 24–25





Renoir

*Woman with Fan*  
—Page 33

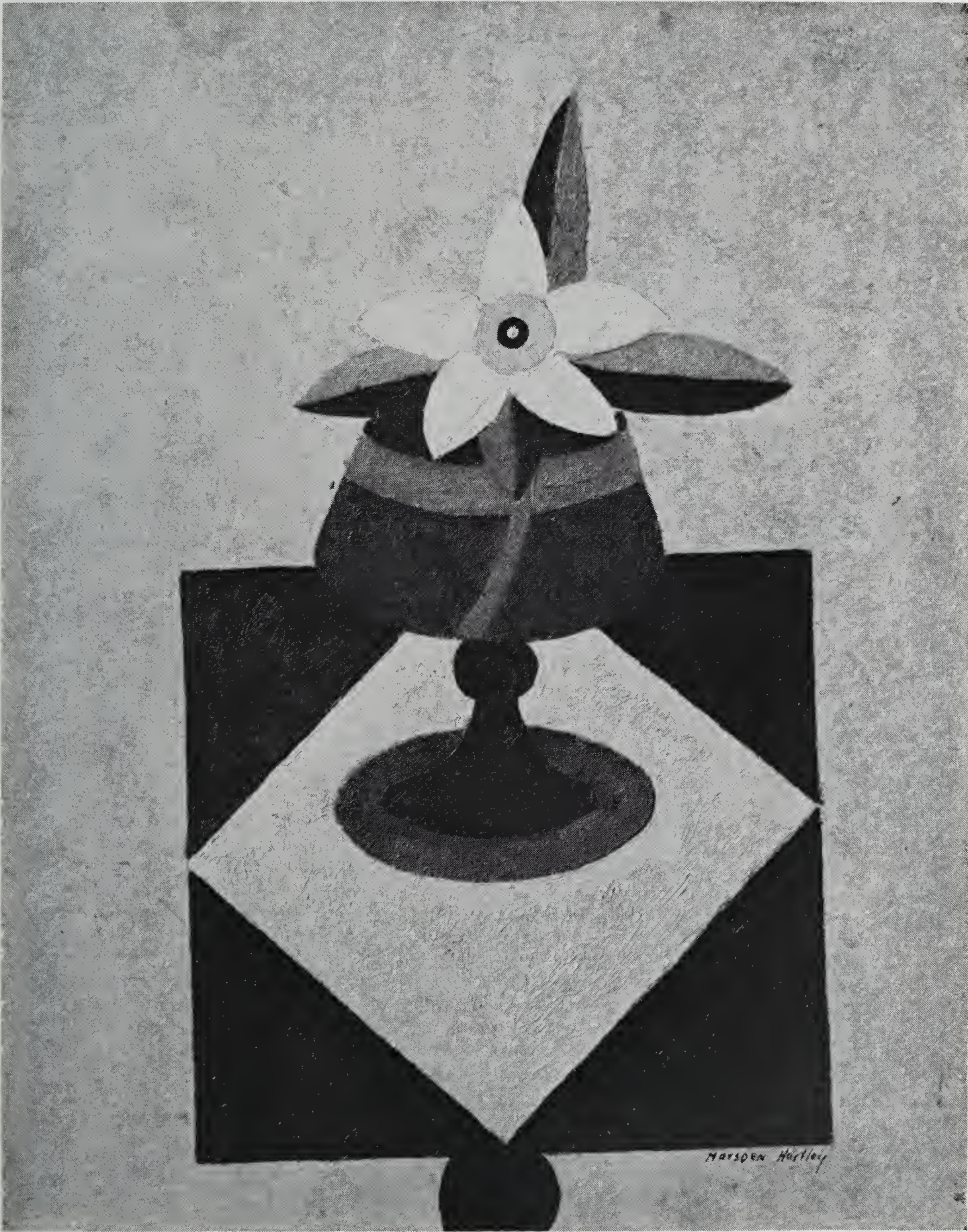




Henri Rousseau

*Woman with Basket of Eggs*  
—Page 57





Marsden Hartley

*Flowerpiece*  
—Page 57





Walasse Ting

*Untitled*  
(Present ownership unknown)—Page 18





Léger

*Woman and Bottle*  
(Formerly Galerie Louis Carré)—Pages 18, 57





Renoir

*Two Girls with Charlotte Hats*  
—Page 30





Botticelli

*Head of Flora* (Detail from *Primavera*)  
(Uffizi, Florence —Photograph: Alinari/  
Art Resource, New York)—Page 32

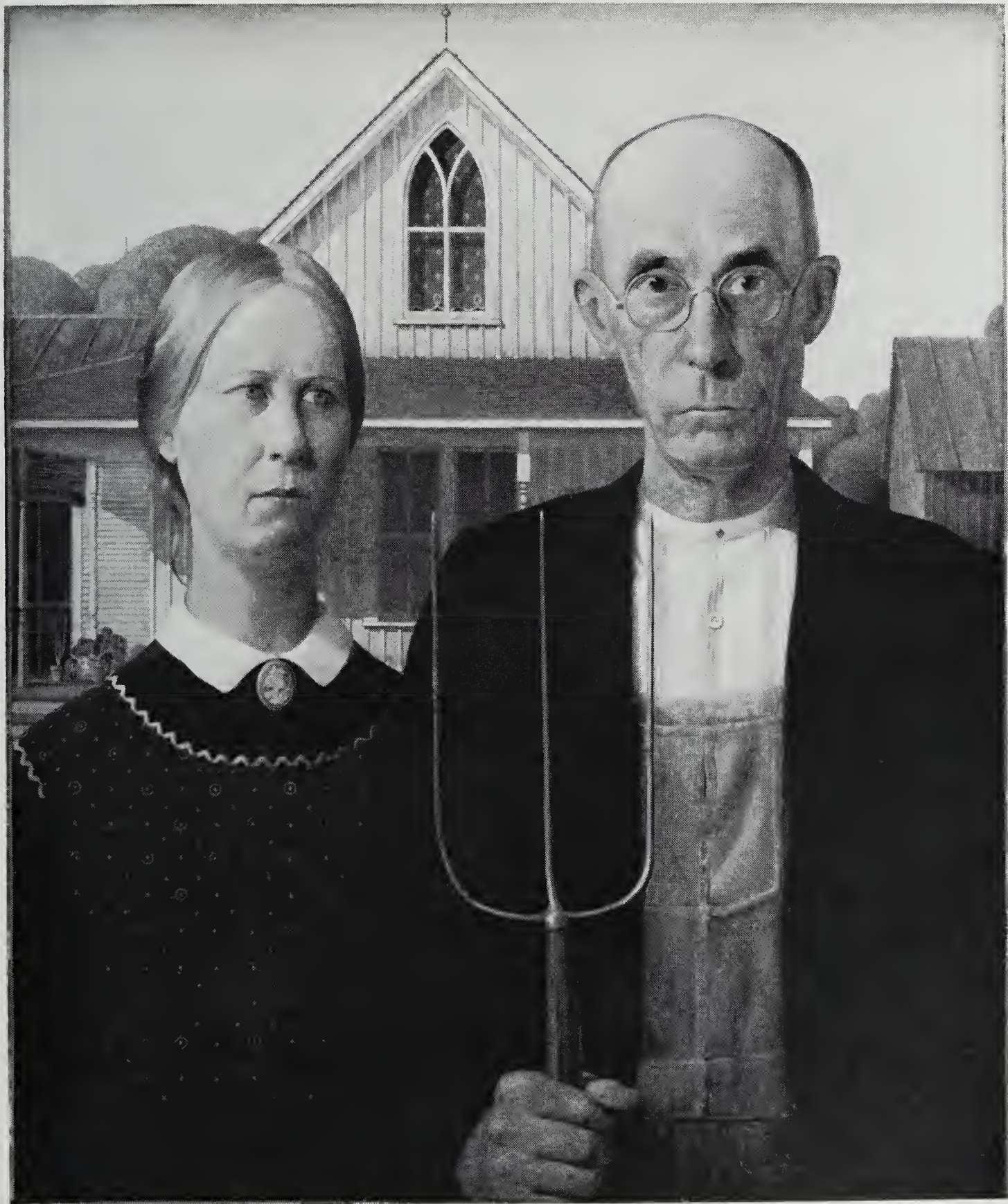




Ghirlandaio

*An Old Man and his Grandson*  
(Louvre, Paris—Photograph: Alinari/  
Art Resource, New York)—Page 33





Grant Wood

*American Gothic*, 1930  
(Copyright 1988 The Art Institute of Chicago. All rights reserved  
—Friends of American Art Collection)—Pages 19, 20–24, 59



PLATE 27



Robert Huot

*Untitled*  
(Present ownership unknown)—Page 18





Spanish  
Fifteenth Century

*Monk at Desk*  
—Page 33





German (Bavarian School)  
Fourteenth Century

*St. Catherine*  
—Pages 32, 33





Leon Kroll

*Nude*  
(Present ownership unknown)—Page 18









Wall Display at  
The Barnes Foundation

Room I (East Wall)  
—Page 29





Sienese  
c. 1420

*Madonna and Child*  
—Page 31





Balthus  
(Oil on canvas, 51¼ × 35 in.)

*Joan Miró and His Daughter Dolores*, 1937–38  
(Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund)—Page 18





Goya

Detail from *Portrait of the Royal Family*  
(Museo del Prado, Madrid—Photograph:  
Scala/Art Resource, New York)—Page 33





El Greco

*Monk in Meditation*  
—Page 30





Bundle of Wood  
—Page 62





Italian Folding Chair  
—Page 62





Windsor Chair  
—Page 65





Ladder Back Chairs  
—Page 63



PLATE 41



Coleman Homsey

*Doli and Ellen*  
(Privately owned)—Page 63





Poster

*Wings Over the World*  
(Present ownership unknown)—Page 63





New Mexican





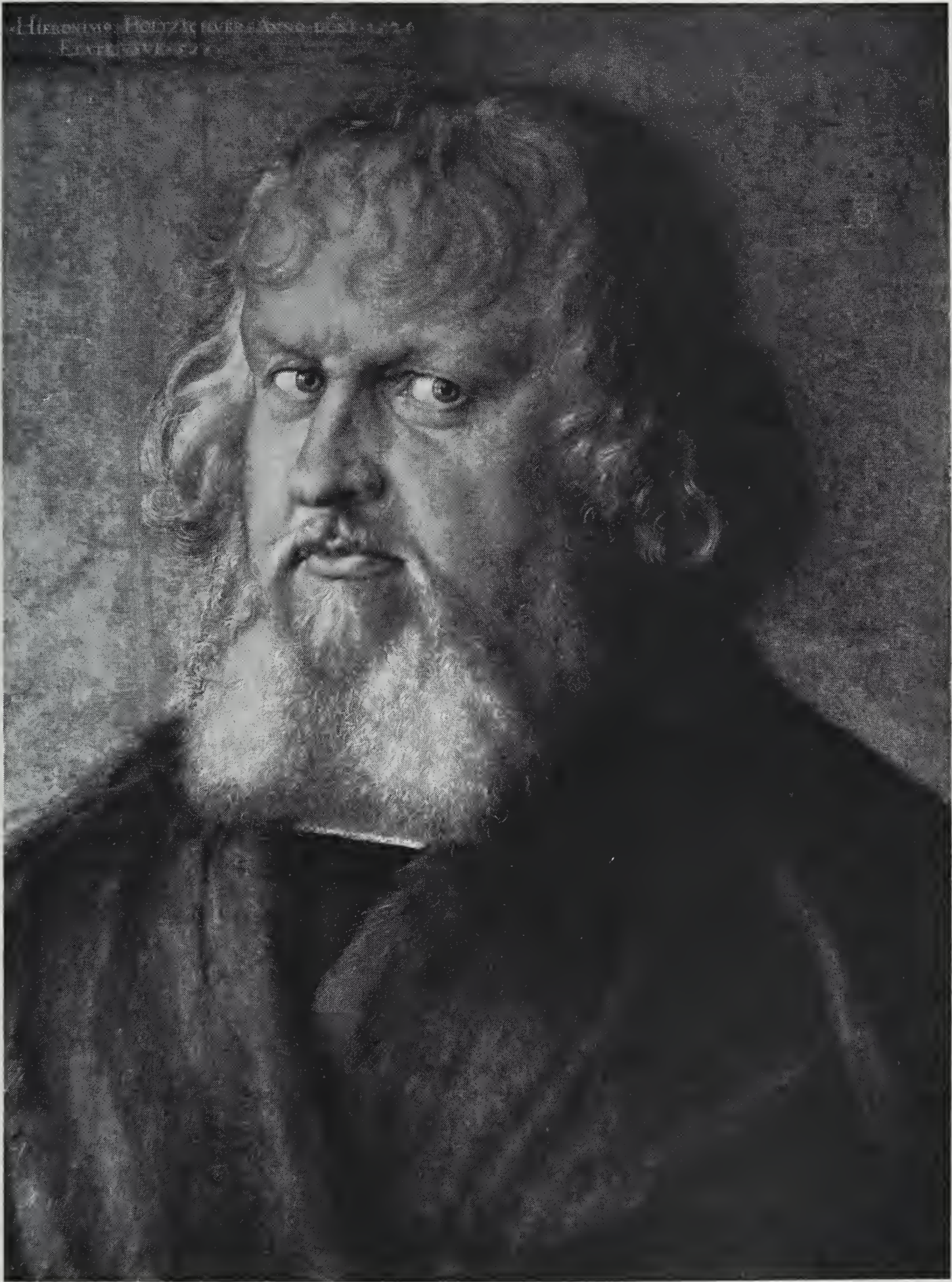




Salvador Dalí

*My wife, nude, contemplating her own flesh becoming stairs, three vertebrae of a column, sky and architecture*  
(Present ownership unknown—Copyright: Artists Rights Society, Inc., New York/Demart Pro Arte, 1988)—Pages 18, 19





Albrecht Dürer

*Hieronymus Holzschuher*  
(Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemälde  
Galerie, West Berlin)—Pages 20, 22, 23





Salvador Dalí  
(Oil on wood,  $12\frac{3}{4} \times 10\frac{1}{2}$  in.)

*Portrait of Gala with the Angelus of Millet, 1935*  
(Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller)—Pages 18–19





Ingres

*Mme Rivière*  
(Louvre, Paris—Photograph:  
Giraudon/Art Resource, New York)—Page 19





Manet

*Portrait of a Girl*  
—Page 27





Manet

Detail from *Portrait of a Girl* (Plate 49)  
—Page 27





Van Eyck

*Man with a Pink*  
(Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemälde  
Galerie, West Berlin—Photograph: Giraudon/Art  
Resource, New York)—Pages 20, 22, 23





Vermeer

*The Kitchen Maid*  
(Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam—Photograph:  
Marburg/Art Resource, New York)—Page 19





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Sixteenth Century

*Mater Dolorosa*  
—Page 62





French  
Twelfth Century

*Madonna*  
—Page 62





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*Man and Son*  
—Pages 30, 33, 56





Rembrandt

*Self-Portrait*  
(Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne)—Page 33





Manet

*Woman Walking in Garden*  
—Page 57





Courbet

*Woman with Doves*  
—Pages 27, 29, 33





Daumier

*The Miller's Daughters*  
—Pages 29–30



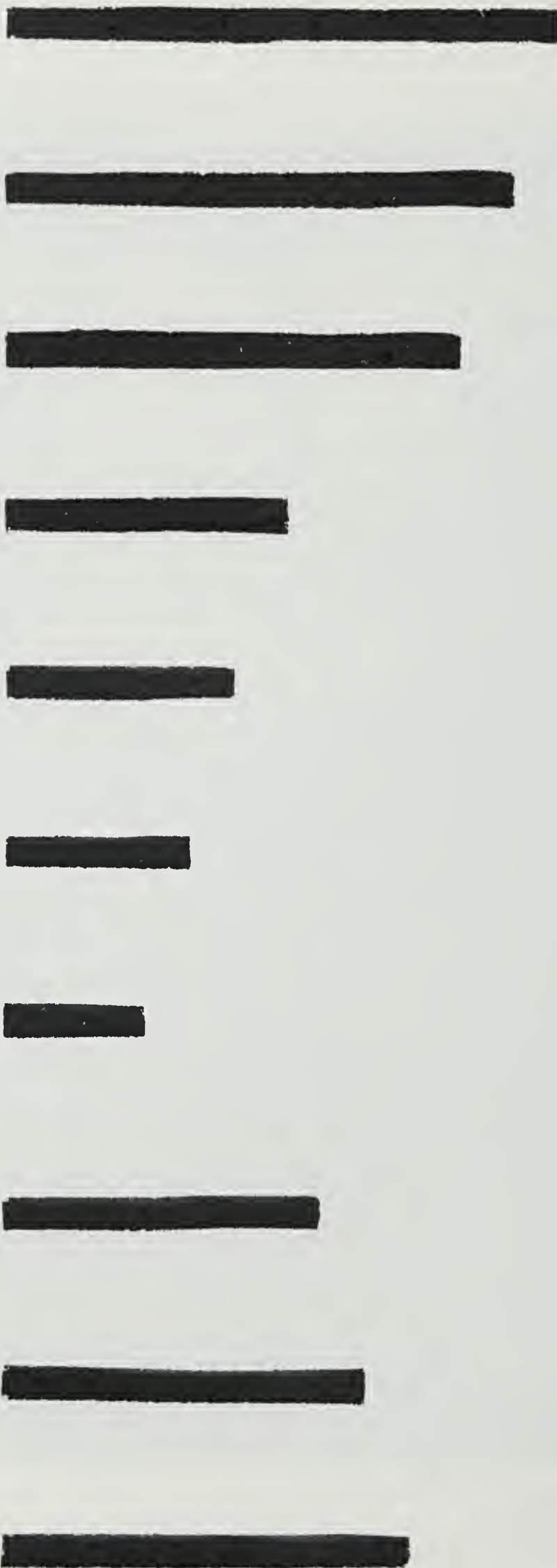


Egyptian, XVIII Dynasty  
Amenhetep I, 1580 B.C.

*Three Figures*  
—Page 32



PLATE 61



Ten lines for diagrams on Plates 62, 63, and 64  
—Page 64







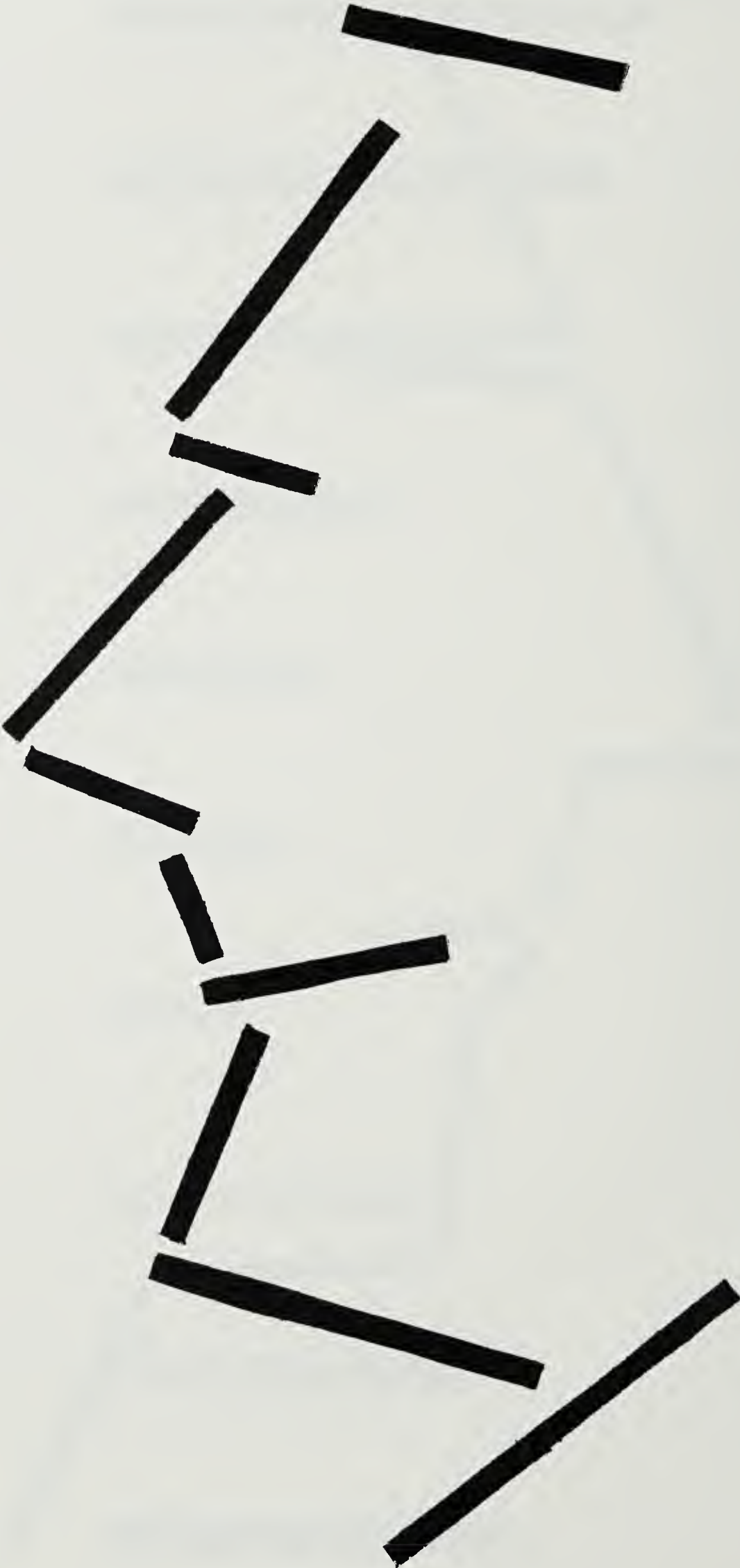






Diagram  
—Page 64





Holbein

*Madonna of Burgomaster Meyer*  
(Landesmuseum, Darmstadt—Photograph:  
Marburg/Art Resource, New York)—Page 32





Renoir

*The Mussel Gatherers*  
—Pages 30, 33





Guerino Starnina  
Master of "The Bambino Vispo"

*Singing Angel* (Fragment from altarpiece)  
—Page 32





Cézanne

*Still Life with Ginger Jar*  
—Page 16



PLATE 69



Chinese  
XVI Century

*Tea Party*  
—Page 57





French Milking Chair  
—Page 32





Renoir

*Mother and Child*  
—Pages 62–63





Renoir

*Mother and Child*  
—Page 63





French  
Sixteenth Century

*Madonna and Child*  
—Page 62





French  
Sixteenth Century

*Madonna and Child*  
—Page 62



PLATE 75



Cézanne

*Nude Seated on Bank*  
—Page 61





Carlo Crivelli

*Madonna and Child*

(The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.  
The Jules Bache Collection, 1949.—49.7.5. All rights reserved,  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art)—Pages 31, 59





Giovanni Bellini

*Madonna and Child*  
(Academy Museum, Venice—Photograph:  
Scala/Art Resource, New York)—Page 63





Gerard David

*Madonna and Child*  
—Page 63





Grant Wood

*Woman with Plant*  
(Present ownership unknown)—Page 25





German

*Woman in Red*  
—Page 25





Yoshi Tsuya





Matisse

*The Riffian*  
—Pages 57, 59





Picasso

*Mother and Child*  
(Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven. Gift of  
Steven C. Clark—Copyright: Artists Rights Society, Inc.,  
New York/SPADEM, 1988)—Page 63





Picasso

*Three Women at the Spring*  
(Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of  
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Society, Inc., New York/SPADEM, 1988)—Page 63

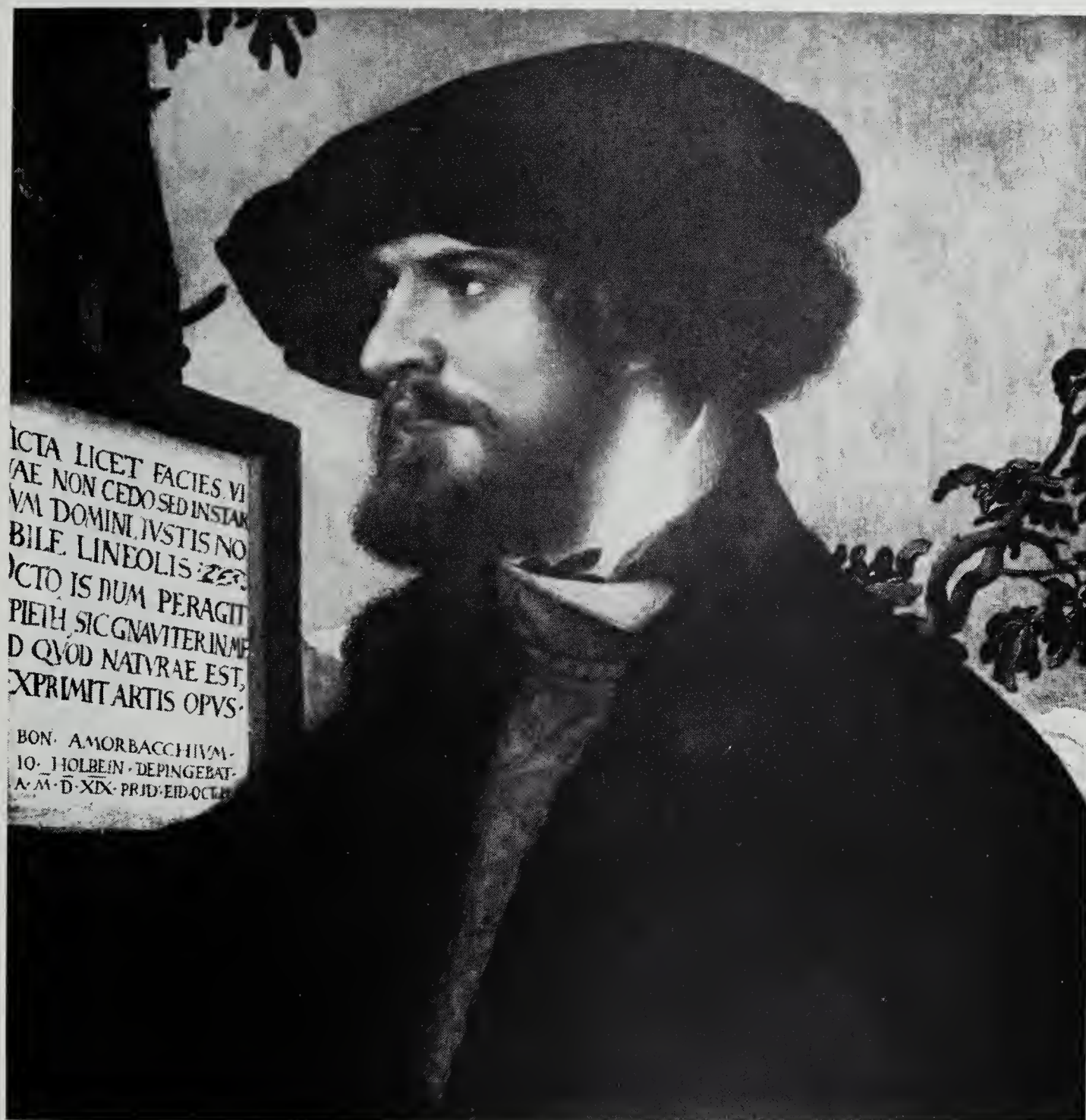




Leonardo da Vinci

*The Madonna Litta*  
(The Hermitage Museum, Leningrad)—Page 26

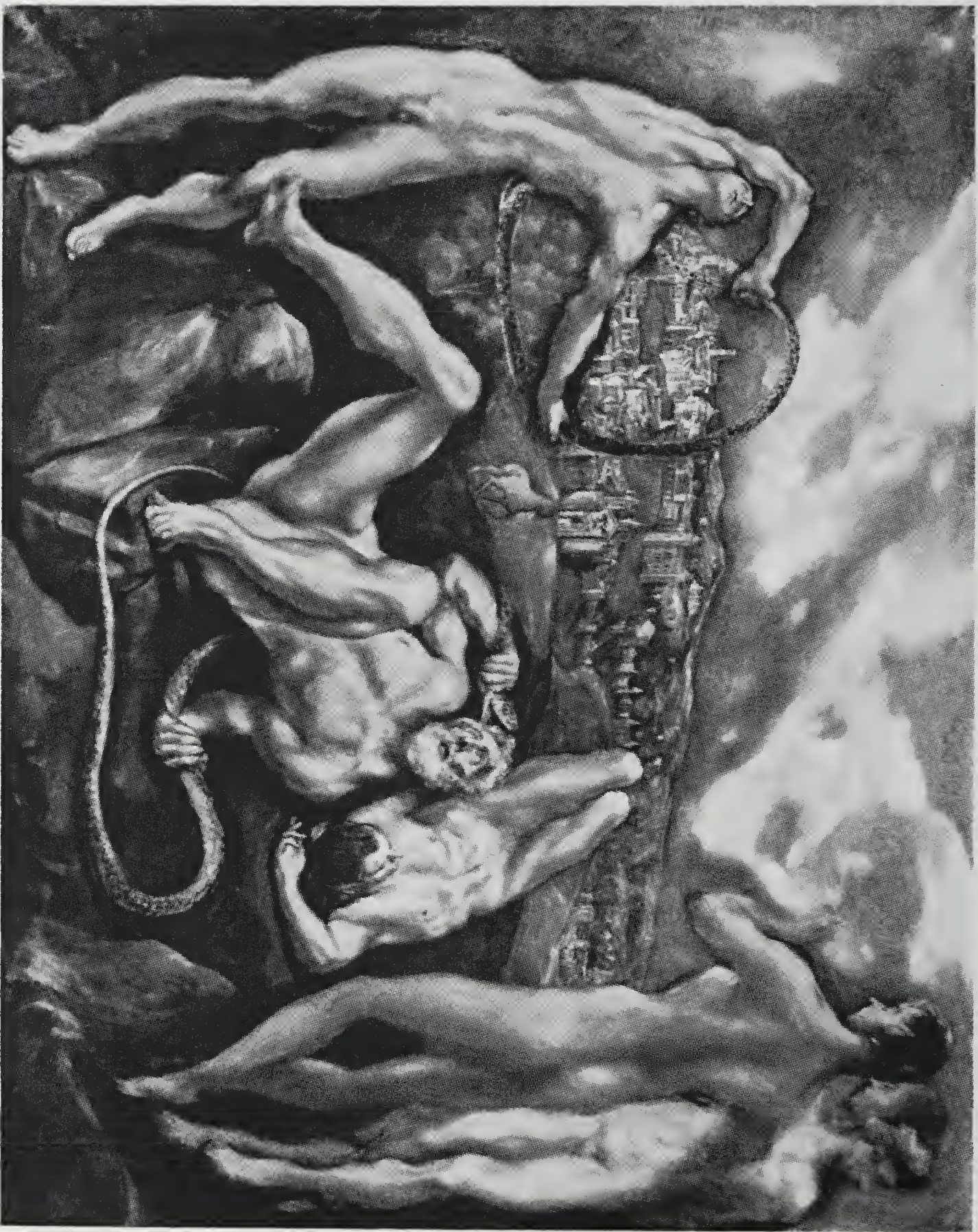




Hans Holbein

*Portrait of Ambrosius Amerbach*  
(Kunstsammlung, Basel—Photograph:  
Marburg/Art Resource, New York)—Page 25





El Greco

*Laocoön*  
(National Gallery of Art, Washington,  
Samuel H. Kress Collection)—Page 26





Snyders

*Le Collier*

(Palais des Beaux Arts, Valenciennes—Photograph:  
Giraudon/Art Resource, New York)—Page 59





Thomas Hart Benton

*At the Beach*  
(Privately owned)—Pages 25, 57, 61





Ben Shahn

*Four-Piece Orchestra*  
(Present ownership unknown)—Page 19





Tal-Coat

*Sifil Life*  
(Present ownership unknown)—Page 18





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Cézanne

*Fruit and Tapestry*  
—Pages 33, 56









Richard Estes

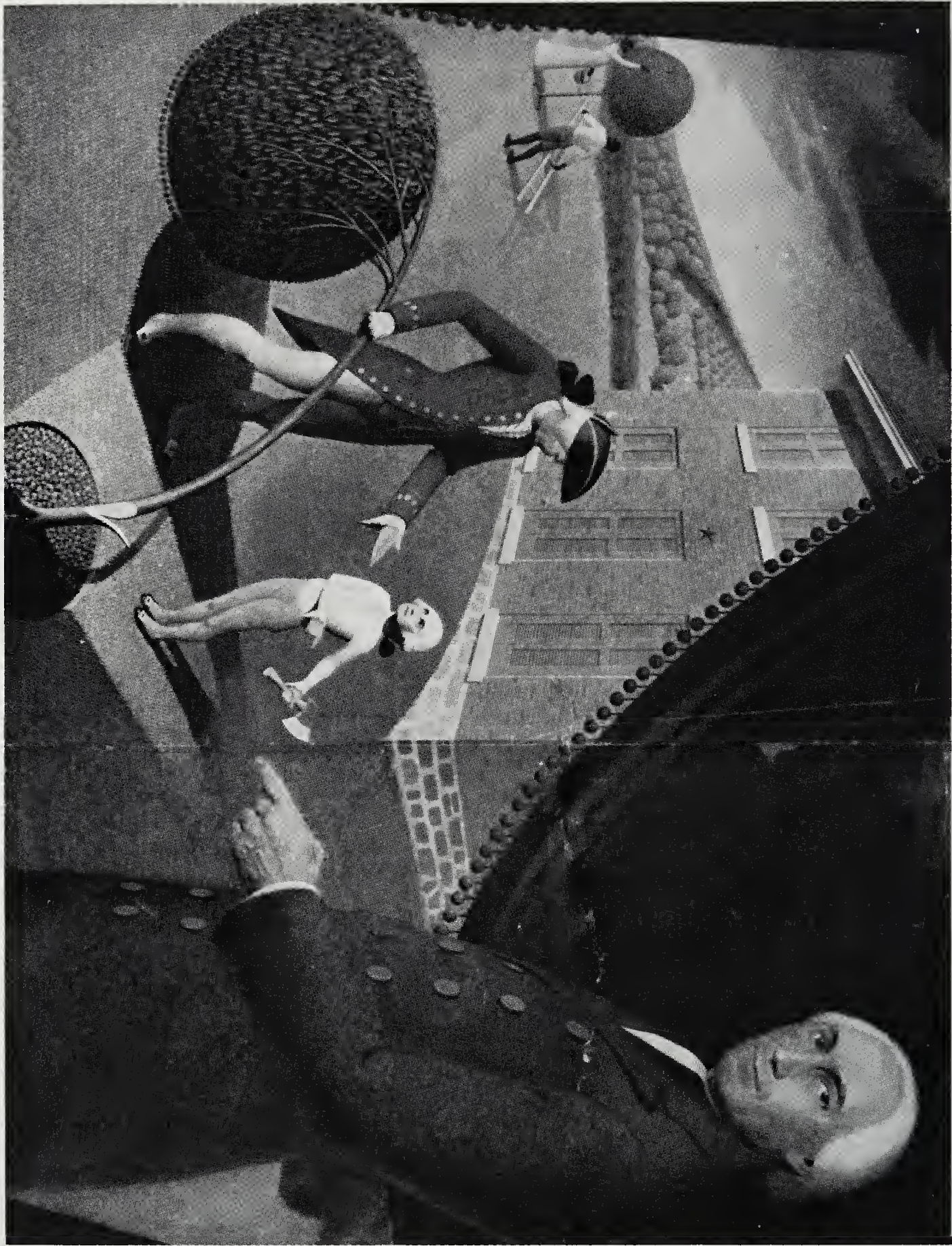
*Untitled*, 1972  
(Present ownership unknown)—Page 18





Sculpture Display at  
The Barnes Foundation





Grant Wood

*Washington and the Cherry Tree*  
(Present ownership unknown)—Page 24





Ben Shahn

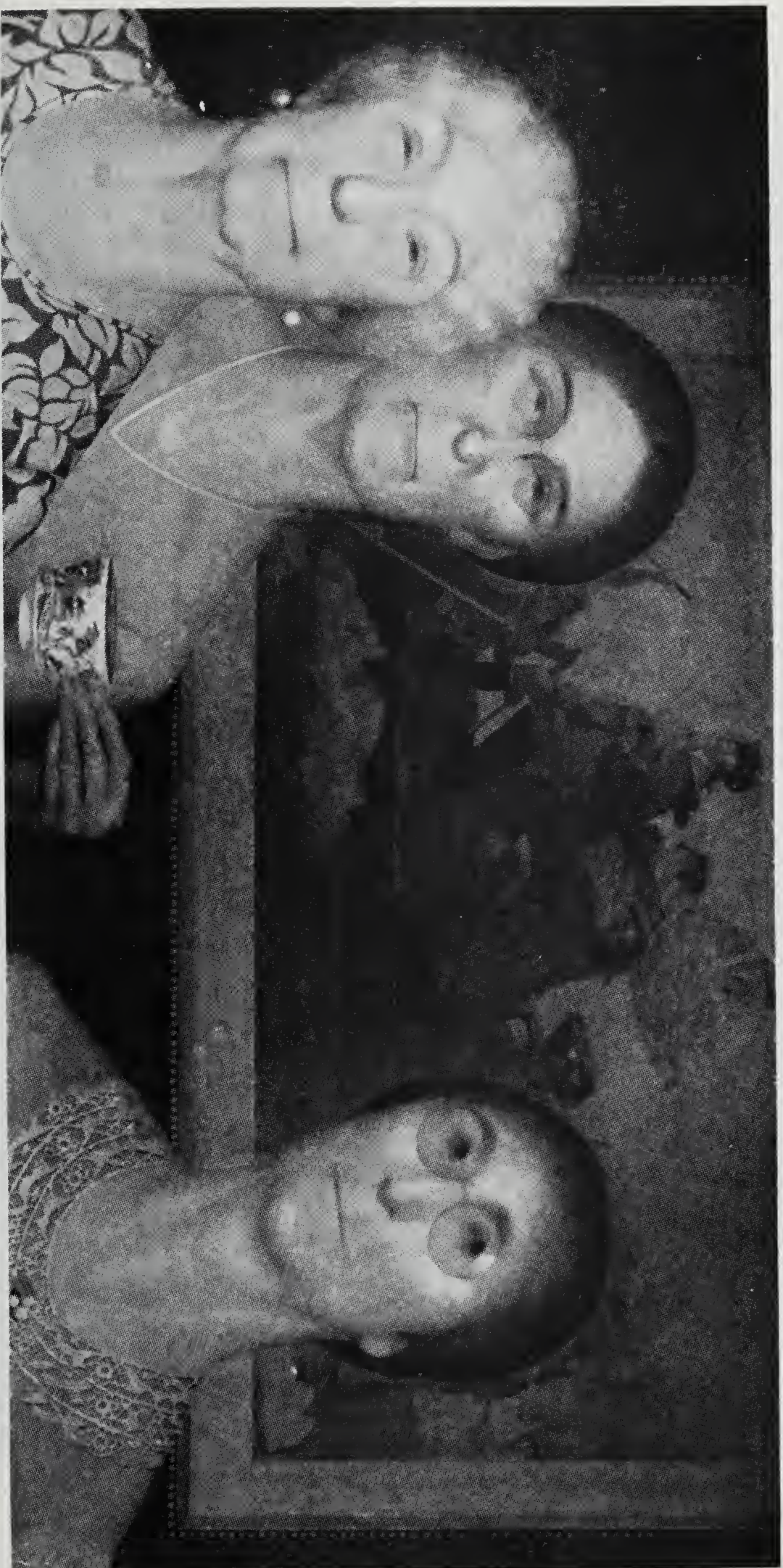
*Portrait of the Artist When Young*  
(Present ownership unknown)—Page 19





John Kane

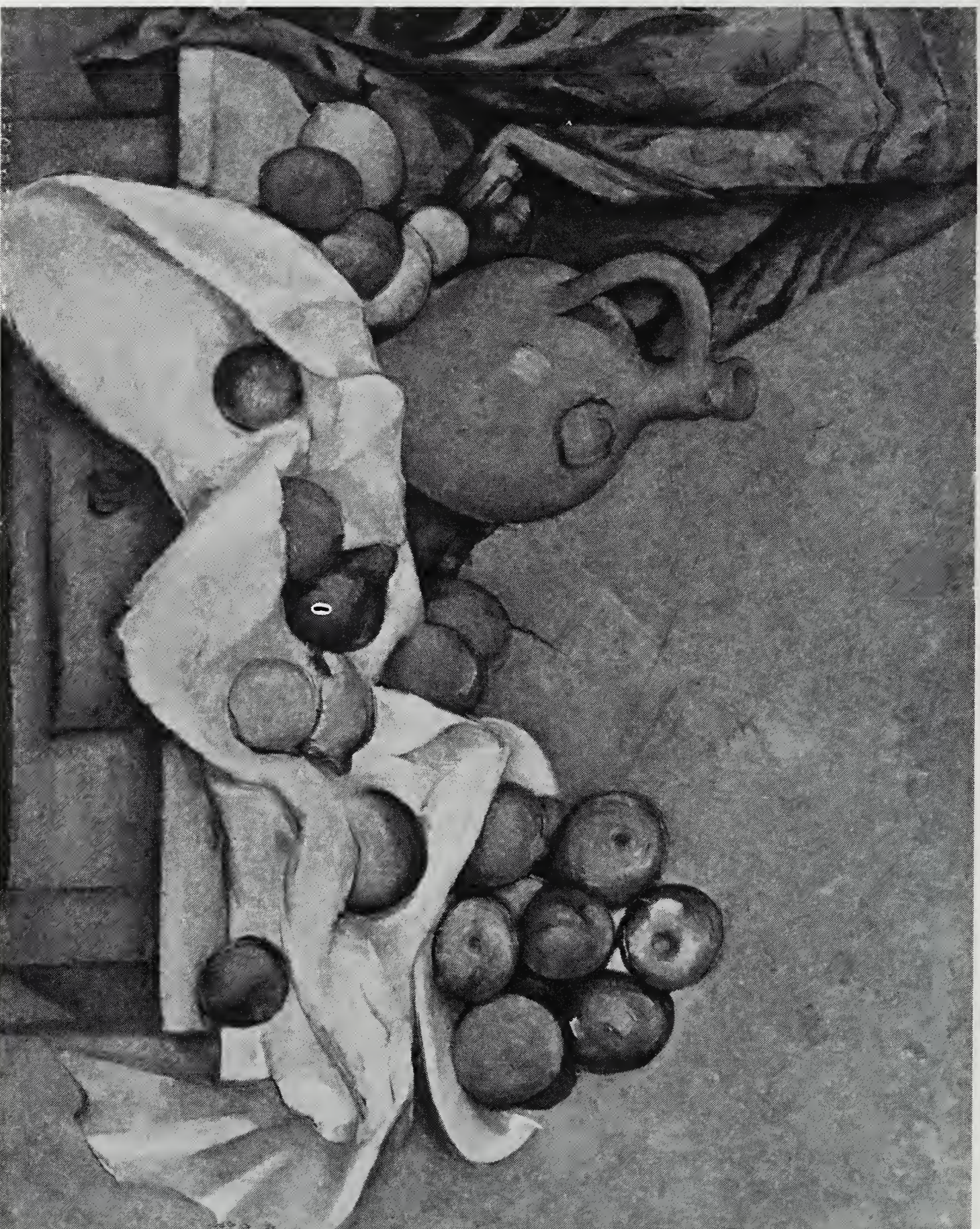




Grant Wood

*The Daughters of the American Revolution*  
(Present ownership unknown)—Page 24





Cézanne

*Still Life with Gray Jug*  
(From the collection of Mrs. John Hay Whitney)—Page 64





Titian

*Entombment*  
(Louvre, Paris—Photograph:  
Scala/Art Resource, New York)—Page 64





Tintoretto

*Christ and the Woman of Samaria*  
—Pages 14, 21–22, 23–24, 29, 33, 56–57





Horace Pippin

*Christ and the Woman of Samaria*  
—Pages 14, 23–24





Tintoretto

*Christ and the Woman of Samaria (upside down)*  
—Page 23





Horace Pippin

*Christ and the Woman of Samaria (upside down)*





Derain

*Landscape*

(Present ownership unknown—Copyright: Artists Rights Society,  
New York/ADAGP, 1988)—Page 31 fm





Courbet

*La Bretonniere Aux Confins De L'indre Et De La Vienne*  
(Present ownership unknown)—Page 31 ftm





Derain

*Flowers*  
(Present ownership unknown—Copyright: Artists Rights Society,  
New York/ADAGP, 1988)—Page 31 fm





Fantin-Latour

*Narcissus et Tulipes*

(Jeu de Paume, Paris—Photograph:

Giraudon/Art Resource, New York)—Page 31 ftm





Henri Rousseau

*Scouts Attacked by a Tiger*  
—Pages 29, 32





Botticelli

*The Birth of Venus*  
(Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence—Photograph:  
Alinari/Art Resource, New York)—Pages 32, 56



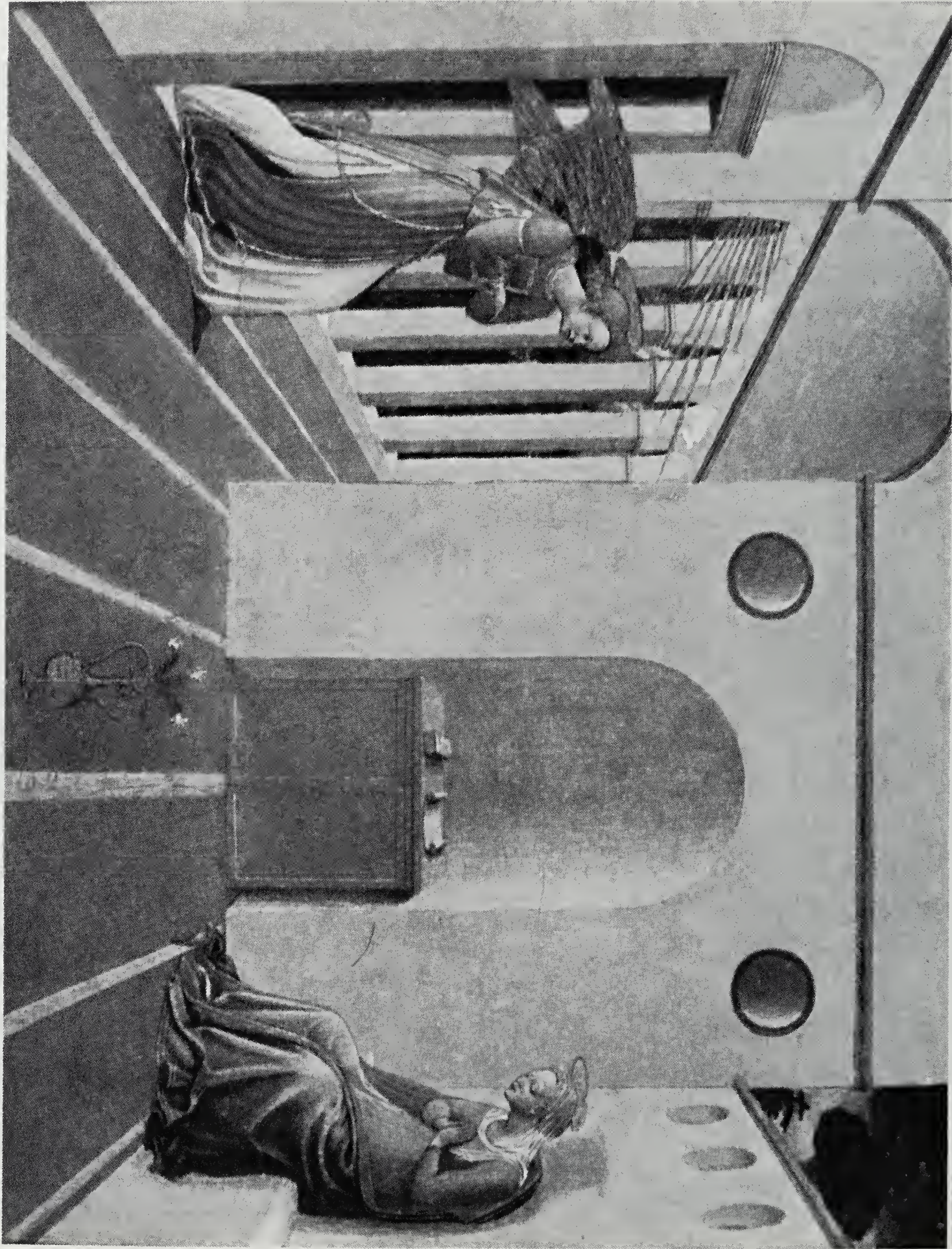


Manet





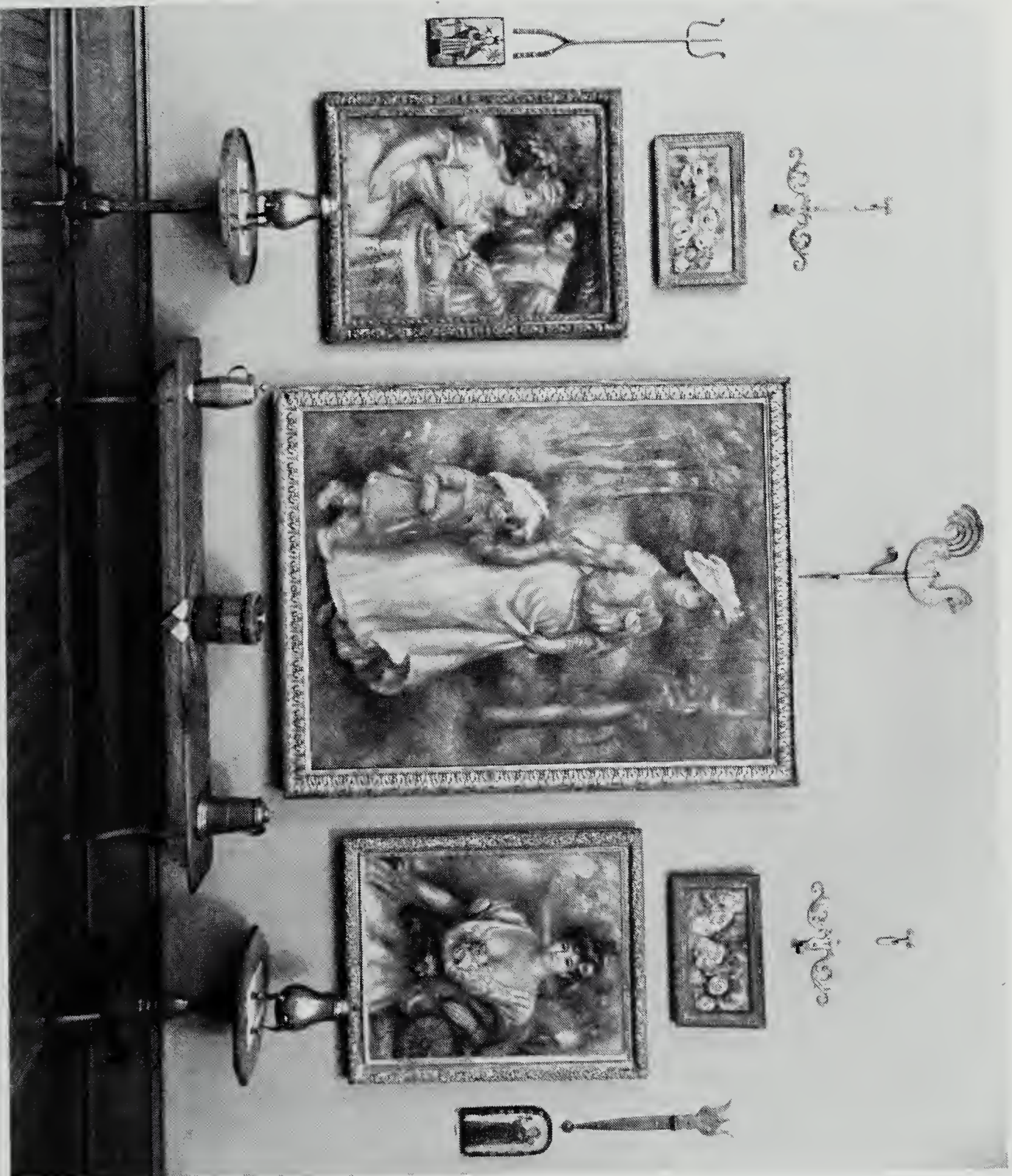




Florentine  
c. 1140

*Lanckoronski Annunciation*  
(Present ownership unknown)—Pages 22, 23





Wall Display at  
The Barnes Foundation

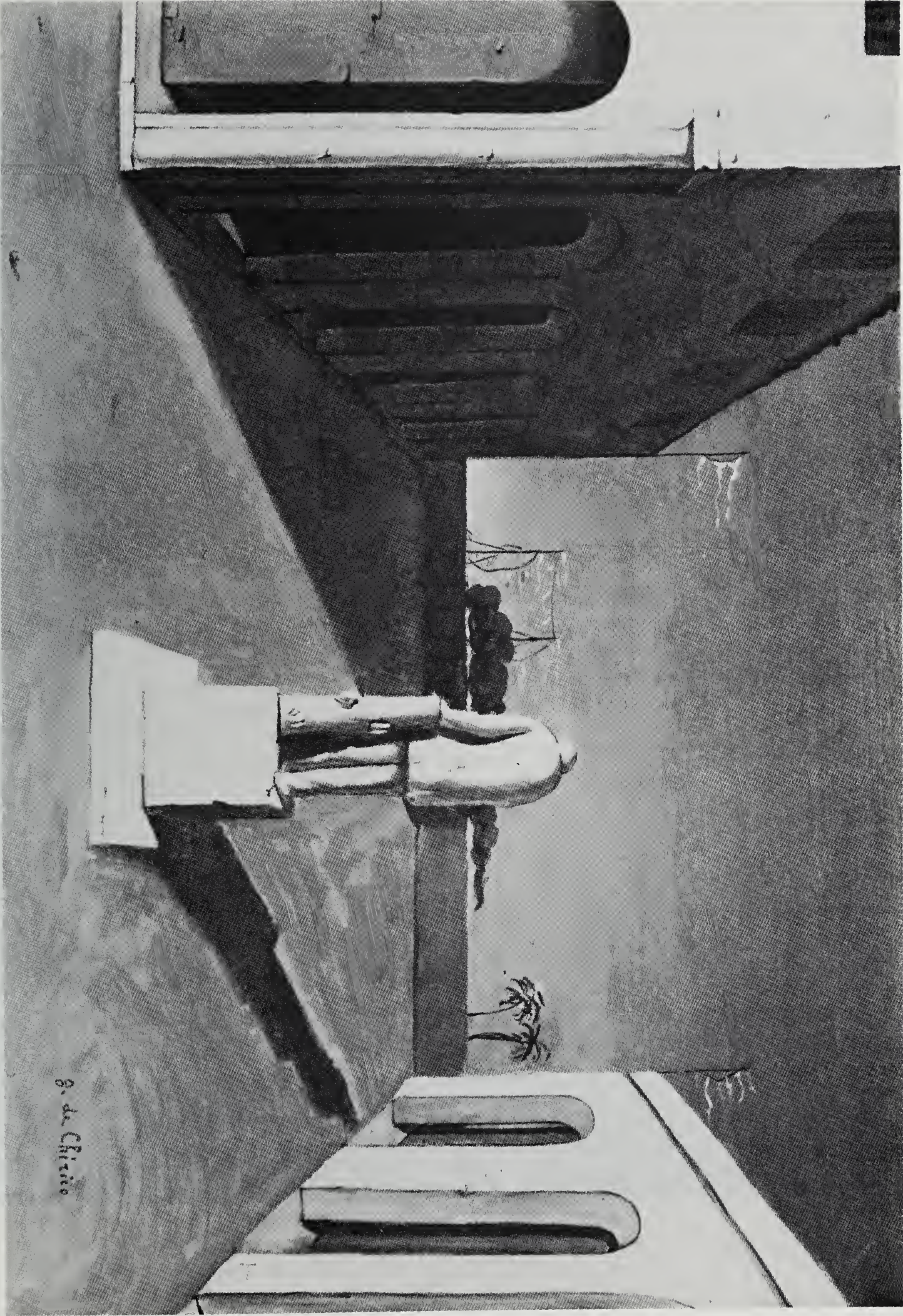




Fra Angelico

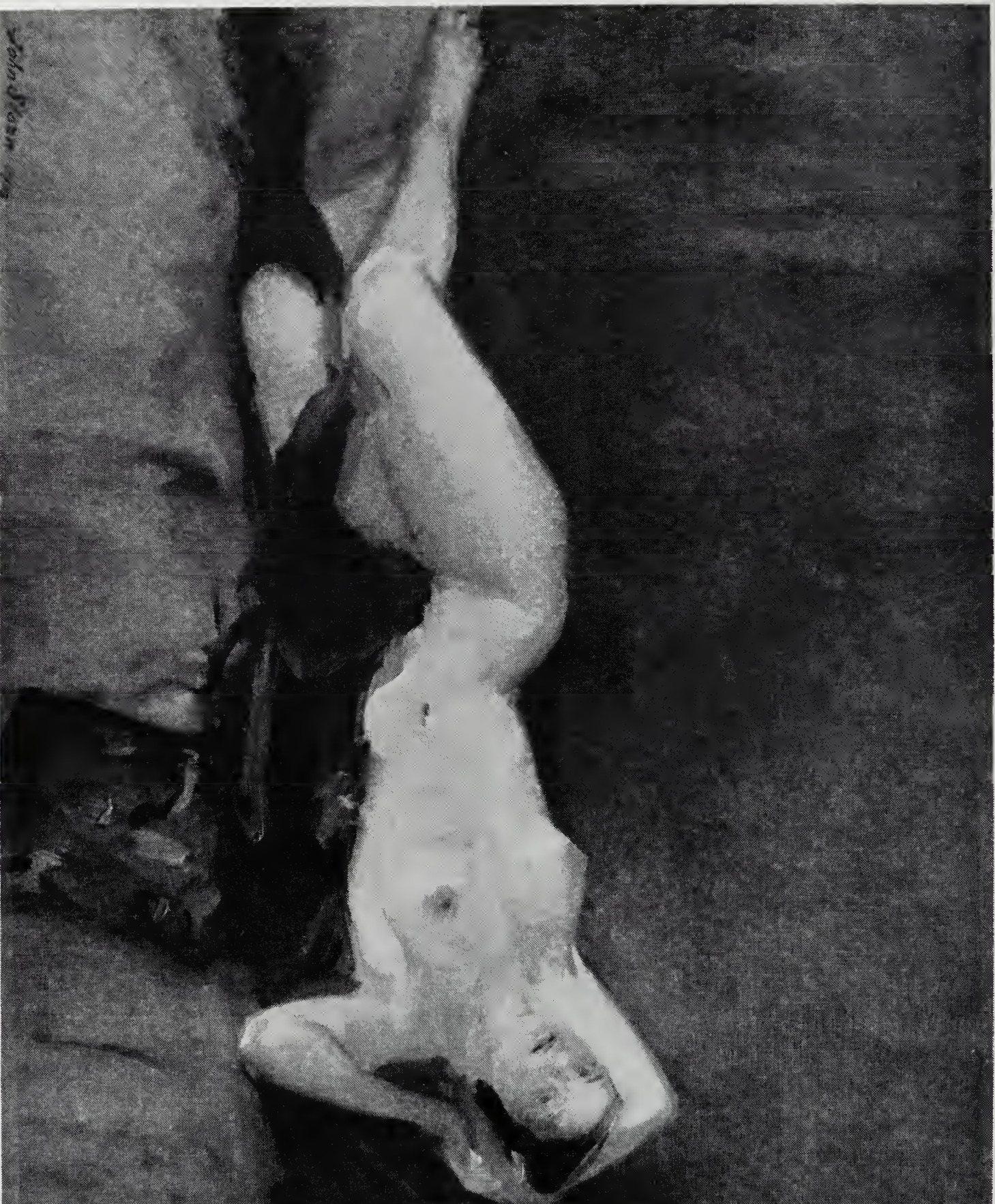
*The Annunciation*  
(San Marco Museum, Florence—Photograph:  
Alinari/Art Resource, New York)—Pages 22, 23





De Chirico





John Sloan





Thomas Hart Benton

*Figure and Boats*  
—Pages 18, 25





Derain

*A View of St. Maximum*  
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Renoir

*Woman in Landscape*  
—Pages 33, 57, 59, 61



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